

E-Pearl of the Week

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HTLV-1 and tropical spastic paraparesis

Human T-lymphotropic virus-1 (HTLV-1)–associated myelopathy (HAM)/tropical spastic paraparesis (TSP) should be considered in patients from tropical regions presenting with an otherwise unexplained progressive paraparesis. Differentiating HAM/TSP from multiple sclerosis (MS) can be challenging in patients from endemic areas, as the majority of people infected with HTLV-1 do not develop HAM/TSP, and because many patients with HAM/TSP will also have lesions on brain MRI. A high CSF proviral load of HTLV-1 detected using PCR (mean of 83 copies/100 cells in HAM/TSP vs. a mean of 1.9 copies/100 cells in HTLV-1 infected, non-HAM/TSP patients in one study) may help differentiate HAM/TSP from patients with MS infected with HTLV-1.

References

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Submitted by David T. Hsieh, M.D.

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