SHORT REPORT: DUAL INFECTIONS WITH PUUMALA VIRUS AND LEPTOSPIRA INTERROGANS SEROVAR LORA IN A BANK VOLE
(CLETHRIONOMYS GLAREOLUS)

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Abstract. Leptospirosis and hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome are public health problems in Croatia. Diagnosis and epidemiology of these diseases are complicated because these two diseases are sympatric in certain areas. We describe a natural dual infection of Puuma virus and a leptospire in a bank vole (Clethrionomys glareolus).

Hantaviruses, which are members of a genus within the family Bunyaviridae, can cause either of two human zoonoses: hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome (HFRS) or hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS).1 Leptospirosis, also a zoonotic infection, is caused by pathogenic members of the bacterial genus Leptospira.2 Both etiologic agents are rodent-borne and are maintained in persistently infected small rodents. Transmission from reservoir hosts to humans is possible through inhalation of virus-contaminated aerosol of rodent excreta (hantaviruses)3 or direct or indirect contact with contaminated environment (leptospira).3 Farmers, soldiers, hunters, campers, hikers, veterinarians, and laboratory workers have the highest risk of infection. The widespread geographic distributions of rodents harboring these pathogens indicate considerable disease-causing potential essentially worldwide. Dual infection of these two agents in humans has been described previously.4,5 We have reported dual infection with Dobrava virus (DOBV) and Leptospira interrogans serovar hardjo in one patient.5

During September 2002, we trapped rodents in northeastern Croatia at two sites: Okučani (45°22′28″N, 17°17′05″E) and Nova Gradiška (45°18′30″N, 17°17′10″E) (approximately 20 km apart) (Figure 1), which were recently shown to be natural foci of HFRS.6 The same region in northeastern Croatia is also known as an area where human and animal leptospirosis are common.7 Sampling of small rodents was done at a hillside on Psunj mountain, ≤ 400 meters above sea level, in forests where common beech (Fagus sylvatica L.) and sessile oak (Quercus petraea (Matt.) Liebl.) predominate. Rodents were captured using Sherman live traps (H.B. Sherman Traps, Tallahassee, FL) and snap traps. We followed animal experimentation guidelines approved by the American Society of Mammalogists.8 Rodents were identified to species, humanely killed, and dissected aseptically, with kidney and lung tissues collected for further studies. Small 50- to 100-g pieces of frozen lung tissues were used for immunoblotting and kidney tissue was extracted for detection of hantaviral RNA. A Western blot was used to test for the presence of hantaviral nucleocapsid antigen. Homogenized specimens were sepa-
that this leptospire was most closely related to the genotype *L. interrogans* sensu stricto serogroup Australis serovar lora. Except for the Adriatic coastal and islands, all of Croatia has been found to be endemic for HFRS. During HFRS outbreaks in Croatia, small, focal, disease-endemic areas with a high prevalence of antibody to hantaviral antigens were reported at Mala Kapela mountain, Novska, and Dinara mountain. In the last 2002 HFRS outbreak, a newly recognized disease-endemic area was confirmed near Nova Gradiška (in northeast Croatia). In addition, a small survey of rodents showed that the entire area of Posavina in northeastern Croatia was a wide natural focus of leptospires (Figure 1).

The bank vole is considered to be the principal reservoir of PUUV in Croatia, with yellow-necked field mice, long-tailed field mice, and striped field mice (*Apodemus agrarius*) playing minor roles in maintenance and transmission of hantaviruses. Coincidentally, rodents most commonly found with leptospires are these same four species. Serovar lora has been isolated from yellow-necked field mice and genetically characterized in Croatia.

There was one bank vole captured near Nova Gradiška with a dual infection of PUUV and *L. interrogans* serovar lora (Figure 1). Since these pathogens share the same reservoir host, this suggests that their geographic distribution provides opportunity for individual bank voles to be infected with both pathogens.

Hantaviruses are principally associated with single rodent hosts. There are no data on the prevalence hantavirus/leptospirosis dual infections among rodents. It is also not known what would be the risk for humans to encounter both infections at the same time. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to demonstrate co-infection of a hantavirus and a leptospira in a rodent reservoir host. From previous studies it is known that northeastern Croatia has a status of a combined focus of leptospirosis and hantavirus infection (Figure 1). We showed that dual infection with these two pathogens may occur in bank voles under natural conditions. Therefore, determining the presence and spread of these etiologic agents of human illnesses by testing local rodent populations might predict the potential for disease emergence. We suggest that tests for both pathogens be used for diagnosis of illnesses in patients suspected to have HFRS or leptospirosis in Croatia and elsewhere in the region.

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