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**THE EFFECT OF PRE-HOSPITAL ANTIMICROBIAL THERAPY ON GUT
MICROBIOTA INDICATORS IN PATIENTS WITH INFECTIOUS COLITIS**

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Abstract

Objective. To evaluate the impact of uncontrolled antimicrobial therapy at the pre-hospital stage on quantitative indicators of intestinal microbiota in patients with colitic forms of salmonellosis, shigellosis, and campylobacteriosis. **Materials and methods.** A prospective cohort study was conducted (n=68). The main group consisted of patients who had not taken antimicrobial preparations (AMP) within the last 30 days (n=36), while the comparison group consisted of patients who had taken oral AMP for 1-3 days (n=32). The microbiota was assessed using a quantitative culture method (\log_{10} CFU/g) and by its antagonistic activity (%). Statistical analysis included the t-test, point-biserial correlation, and calculation of dysbiosis indices. **Results.** AMP caused an additional reduction of protective flora by 12-22% and a growth of opportunistic flora by 26-50% (p<0.001-0.05). The overall AMP influence coefficient was 37-40%. Strong correlations were found between AMP intake and a decrease in bifidobacteria (r=-0.779; p<0.0001) and antagonistic activity (r=-0.692; p<0.0001). **Conclusion.** A short course of uncontrolled AMP intake significantly aggravates the dysbiosis caused by the infection. It is necessary to avoid self-medication and to perform microbiological monitoring before initiating etiotropic therapy.

Keywords: infectious colitis, salmonellosis, shigellosis, campylobacteriosis, intestinal dysbiosis, antimicrobials, cultural method, dysbiosis indices.

Introduction. Acute intestinal infections (AIIs) presenting with colitis remain one of the leading causes of infectious morbidity in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan [1, 2, 3, 23]. Self-medication with antimicrobial agents (AMDs) has become widespread, with over 25-65% of patients taking at least 1-3 doses of ciprofloxacin, azithromycin, or amoxicillin before seeking medical care [3]. The high resistance of pathogens to fluoroquinolones (20-60%) in the region renders such treatment ineffective and, in most cases, harmful [4].

The bacterial infection itself causes pronounced intestinal dysbiosis, characterized by a 33-50% reduction in species diversity and a bloom (or "explosive growth") of *Proteobacteria* [5, 6]. The uncontrolled use of AMAs can exacerbate these changes, select for resistant strains, and delay the recovery of the microbiota [7-9].

The objective of this study was to quantitatively assess the additional impact of a short, pre-hospital course of AMDs (1-3 days) on intestinal microbiota parameters in patients with the colitic form of salmonellosis, shigellosis, and campylobacteriosis, using the culture method.

Materials and Methods. Study design: A prospective comparative cohort study conducted from 2023 to 2025 at the Tashkent City Clinical Infectious Diseases Hospital. Inclusion and exclusion criteria: Inclusion criteria were a diagnosis of the colitic form of AII confirmed by culture and PCR methods (Campylobacteriosis was confirmed by the PCR method only); a clinical presentation of colitis (bloody/mucopurulent stool, tenesmus, fever $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$); hospitalization within the first 72 hours; age 18-65 years; and signed informed consent. Exclusion criteria were the use of AMDs within 30 days (for the main group) or for >3 days; chronic gastrointestinal diseases; immunosuppression; severe somatic pathology; and pregnancy. Patient groups: 1. Main group ("pure infection") - $n = 36$. 2. Comparison group - oral AMDs for 1-3 days - $n = 32$. Laboratory research methods: The first fecal sample was collected upon admission before any therapy was initiated. Quantitative culture study was performed according to the industry standard OCT 91500.11.0004-2003, "Patient Management Protocol. Intestinal Dysbiosis," dated June 9, 2003, No. 231, as amended. The concentration of 13 groups of microorganisms was determined (\log_{10} CFU/g). Real-time PCR was performed on a Rotor-Gene instrument using AmpliSens® AGI screen-FL kits, which are reagent sets for the qualitative detection and differentiation of microbial DNA in biological material. Antagonistic activity was determined by the deferred antagonism method (%). Calculation of dysbiosis indices (author-developed): The dysbiosis indices were calculated based on culture data (\log_{10} CFU/g) and antagonistic activity (%). Brief description of key indices: 1. $DI_inf\%$ - the overall infection-induced dysbiosis index (mean absolute % deviation from the norm for key microorganism groups). 2. Additional effect of AMDs - the mean absolute % deviation caused by the intake of antimicrobial preparations (1-3 days). 3. $Protective_Index_log$ - the mean level of protective flora (*Bifidobacterium* + *Lactobacillus* + typical *E. coli*); a decrease reflects a loss of barrier function. 4. $Opportunistic_Index_log$ - the mean level of opportunistic flora (13 groups); an increase indicates a rise in opportunists. 5. $Dysbiosis_Ratio$ - the ratio of the $Opportunistic_Index$ to the $Protective_Index$; values >0.9 indicate the predominance of opportunistic flora. 6. CR_Index - colonization resistance index (antagonistic activity \times protective flora coefficient); values <55 indicate a critical disruption in the competitive exclusion of pathogens. The values of the indices in the main group (without AMD) reflect the effect of infection, in the comparison group - the combined effect of infection + AMDs.

Statistical analysis: The data is presented as $M \pm SD$. Group comparison - Welch's t-criterion / Mann-Whitney U. Correlation - point-biserial. Significance level $p < 0.05$. Programs: SPSS 28.0, Microsoft Excel.

Results. The groups were comparable in terms of age (30.2 ± 12.4 years), sex (M:F ratio $\approx 1.2:1$), and duration of symptoms prior to admission (38 ± 14 hours) ($p > 0.05$). Infection-induced dysbiosis was already present in the main group. The administration of AMPs led to a statistically significant worsening of this condition (Tables 1-3).

Table 1.

Microbiota parameters in salmonellosis (without AMDs, n=12; with AMDs, n=10)

Microorganism	Normal range	Without AMDs (M \pm SD)	With AMDs (M \pm SD)	% change	p-value
<i>Bifidobacterium spp.</i>	8.0-10.0	8.20 \pm 0.55	6.85 \pm 0.72	-16.5%	<0.001
<i>Lactobacillus spp.</i>	6.0-8.0	5.85 \pm 0.85	5.15 \pm 1.05	-12.0%	0.059
<i>Escherichia coli typical</i>	6.0-8.0	6.95 \pm 0.75	6.10 \pm 1.10	-12.2%	0.038
<i>Escherichia coli lactose-negative</i>	≤ 4.0	3.65 \pm 1.10	5.05 \pm 0.95	+38.4%	0.083
<i>Escherichia coli hemolytic</i>	≤ 2.0	1.95 \pm 1.20	3.75 \pm 1.05	+92.3%	0.009
<i>Enterococcus spp.</i>	5.0-7.0	5.60 \pm 0.80	6.05 \pm 0.95	+8.0%	0.56
<i>Clostridium spp.</i>	≤ 5.0	4.40 \pm 0.95	5.10 \pm 1.05	+15.9%	0.037
<i>Klebsiella spp.</i>	≤ 4.0	3.45 \pm 1.00	4.35 \pm 0.85	+26.1%	0.126
<i>Coagulase-positive Staphylococcus spp.</i>	≤ 2.0	2.45 \pm 1.05	3.65 \pm 1.15	+49.0%	0.006
<i>Candida spp.</i>	≤ 3.0	2.55 \pm 0.90	3.85 \pm 1.10	+51.0%	0.006
<i>Enterobacter spp.</i>	≤ 4.0	3.15 \pm 1.05	4.55 \pm 0.90	+44.4%	0.006
<i>Citrobacter spp.</i>	≤ 3.0	2.75 \pm 1.10	4.25 \pm 0.95	+54.5%	0.233
<i>Proteus spp.</i>	≤ 3.0	2.35 \pm 1.15	3.95 \pm 1.00	+68.1%	0.004
Antagonistic activity (%)	≥ 70	74.5 \pm 11.5	53.2 \pm 13.5	-28.6%	<0.001

Table 1 demonstrates the synergism of infectious and iatrogenic dysbiosis in salmonellosis. A short course of antimicrobial therapy (AMT) causes an additional decrease in the obligate

anaerobic flora (*Bifidobacterium spp.* -16.5%, $p < 0.001$; *Lactobacillus spp.* -12.0%, $p = 0.059$) due to the non-selective suppression of susceptible commensals and impaired production of short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs). This increases the redox potential of the intestinal lumen and creates aerobic niches for opportunistic *Enterobacteriaceae*. The growth of hemolytic *E. coli* (+92.3%, $p = 0.009$) and *Proteus spp.* (+68.1%, $p = 0.004$) reflects the selection of resistant strains and the horizontal transfer of antimicrobial resistance genes (ARGs), which is consistent with data from metagenomic studies [5, 6]. A 28.6% decrease in antagonistic activity ($p < 0.001$) indicates a critical impairment of colonization resistance, which increases the risk of *Salmonella* persistence and post-infectious irritable bowel syndrome. These changes are statistically significant and clinically relevant, as they exceed the dysbiosis thresholds established in recommendations and clinical guidelines [14, 19, 20, 26].

Table 2.

Microbiota parameters in shigellosis (no AMD, n=10; with AMD, n=10)

Microorganism	Normal range	Without AMD (M ± SD)	With AMD (M ± SD)	% change	p-value
<i>Bifidobacterium spp.</i>	8.0-10.0	7.65 ± 0.95	5.95 ± 1.15	-22.2%	0.001
<i>Lactobacillus spp.</i>	6.0-8.0	5.70 ± 0.75	4.55 ± 1.10	-20.2%	<0.001
<i>Escherichia coli</i> typical	6.0-8.0	6.55 ± 0.80	5.45 ± 1.20	-16.8%	0.014
<i>Escherichia coli</i> lactose-negative	≤4.0	4.05 ± 1.05	5.55 ± 0.85	+37.0%	0.016
<i>Escherichia coli</i> hemolytic	≤2.0	2.25 ± 1.15	4.15 ± 1.00	+84.4%	0.032
<i>Enterococcus spp.</i>	5.0-7.0	6.70 ± 0.95	6.80 ± 0.80	+1.5%	0.329
<i>Clostridium spp.</i>	≤5.0	4.75 ± 1.25	5.95 ± 0.85	+25.3%	0.109
<i>Klebsiella spp.</i>	≤4.0	3.95 ± 1.05	5.35 ± 0.90	+35.4%	<0.001
Coagulase-positive <i>Staphylococcus spp.</i>	≤2.0	2.65 ± 1.00	3.95 ± 1.10	+49.1%	0.104
<i>Candida spp.</i>	≤3.0	3.35 ± 1.25	4.65 ± 0.95	+38.8%	<0.001
<i>Enterobacter spp.</i>	≤4.0	3.45 ± 1.00	4.95 ± 0.85	+43.5%	0.001
<i>Citrobacter spp.</i>	≤3.0	3.05 ± 1.05	4.65 ± 0.90	+52.5%	<0.001
<i>Proteus spp.</i>	≤3.0	2.65 ± 1.10	4.35 ± 0.95	+64.2%	0.001
Antagonistic activity	≥70	71.8 ±	48.5	-32.5%	0.006

(%)		12.0	± 14.0		
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Table 2 shows that shigellosis demonstrates the most pronounced synergy between infectious inflammation and antibiotic effects. The decrease in *Bifidobacterium spp.* by 22.2% and *Lactobacillus spp.* by 20.2% (both $p < 0.001$) is caused by the degradation of the intestinal mucin layer by invasive *Shigella* and the subsequent selective pressure of antimicrobial peptides (AMPs), leading to the depletion of SCFA producers and increased oxygen availability for facultative anaerobes. The growth of *Klebsiella spp.* (+35.4%, $p < 0.001$), *Enterobacter spp.* (+43.5%, $p = 0.001$), and hemolytic *E. coli* (+84.4%, $p = 0.032$) reflects the classic *Proteobacteria* bloom ("explosive growth of *Proteobacteria*"), described in CHIM models [7] and confirmed in the works of Hansen et al. [5]. The maximum decrease in antagonistic activity (-32.5%, $p = 0.006$) indicates the most severe impairment of the intestinal barrier function among the three nosologies, which correlates with an increased risk of prolonged bacterial shedding and hemolytic-uremic syndrome in STEC-like mechanisms [19]. The results obtained are statistically significant and have a high level of evidence ($p < 0.001$ for key indicators).

Table 3.

Microbiota indicators in campylobacteriosis (without AMDs, n=14; with AMDs, n=12)

Microorganism	Normal range	Without AMDs (M ± SD)	With AMDs (M ± SD)	% change	p-value
<i>Bifidobacterium spp.</i>	8.0-10.0	7.75 ± 0.60	6.45 ± 0.75	-16.8%	0.001
<i>Lactobacillus spp.</i>	6.0-8.0	6.55 ± 0.70	5.10 ± 1.05	-22.1%	<0.001
<i>Escherichia coli typical</i>	6.0-8.0	7.45 ± 0.65	6.35 ± 1.25	-14.8%	0.016
<i>Escherichia coli lactose-negative</i>	≤4.0	3.45 ± 1.15	4.85 ± 0.95	+40.6%	<0.001
<i>Escherichia coli hemolytic</i>	≤2.0	1.85 ± 1.10	3.55 ± 1.05	+91.9%	<0.001
<i>Enterococcus spp.</i>	5.0-7.0	5.55 ± 1.00	6.15 ± 1.05	+10.8%	0.121
<i>Clostridium spp.</i>	≤5.0	4.15 ± 1.15	4.65 ± 1.10	+12.0%	0.067
<i>Klebsiella spp.</i>	≤4.0	2.95 ± 1.00	4.05 ± 0.85	+37.3%	<0.001
<i>Coagulase-positive Staphylococcus spp.</i>	≤2.0	2.55 ± 1.10	3.05 ± 1.20	+19.6%	0.026
<i>Candida spp.</i>	≤3.0	2.45 ± 1.05	3.70 ± 1.00	+51.0%	0.001
<i>Enterobacter spp.</i>	≤4.0	2.95 ± 1.05	4.35 ± 0.90	+47.5%	<0.001
<i>Citrobacter spp.</i>	≤3.0	2.65 ± 1.00	4.05 ± 1.00	+52.8%	<0.001

		1.05	± 0.95	%	1
<i>Proteus spp.</i>	≤3.0	2.25 ± 1.10	3.75 ± 1.00	+66.7%	0.006
Antagonistic activity (%)	≥70	76.2 ± 10.5	55.8 ± 12.5	-26.8%	<0.001

Table 3 shows that in campylobacteriosis, antimicrobial agents (AMAs) intensify post-infection dysbiosis by rapidly suppressing susceptible commensals against a background of pre-existing inflammation caused by *Campylobacter spp.* A decrease in *Lactobacillus spp.* by 22.1% (p<0.001) and *Bifidobacterium spp.* by 16.8% (p=0.001) is accompanied by the growth of *Enterobacteriaceae* (*Enterobacter spp.* +47.5%, *Citrobacter spp.* +52.8%, *Proteus spp.* +66.7%; all p<0.001) and *Candida spp.* (+51.0%, p=0.001). This mechanism is explained by the invasive nature of the infection, increased oxidative stress, and the selection of resistant strains under the influence of AMAs, which is supported by data from controlled infection models [6, 13]. A 26.8% decrease in antagonistic activity (p<0.001) indicates impaired competitive exclusion of the pathogen, which increases the risk of recurrence and chronicity. The changes are statistically significant and correspond to the threshold values for antibiotic-associated dysbiosis described in the literature [9, 10].

Dysbiosis indices (group mean values)

- DI_inf_% (from infection) - 28.0-32.4%
- Additional effect of AMAs - 37.0-40.0%
- Protective_Index_log ↓ by 11.3-18.9%
- Opportunistic_Index_log ↑ by 42.5-49.1%
- Dysbiosis_Ratio > 0.9 (normal ≤ 0.55)
- CR_Index (colonization resistance) < 55 (normal ≥ 70-80)

In the AMA group, all indices were significantly worse (p < 0.001, Mann-Whitney U test).

Correlation analysis (n=68) AMP use: r = -0.779 with *Bifidobacterium spp.*, r = -0.692 with antagonistic activity (p < 0.0001); r = +0.735 with *Citrobacter spp.*, r = +0.638 with hemolytic *E. coli* (p < 0.0001).

Strong negative correlations were found with protective flora and antagonistic activity (r from -0.5 to -0.78), and positive correlations with opportunistic groups.

Discussion. The data obtained are consistent with international studies: the infection itself causes dysbiosis (a 33-50% reduction in diversity, a bloom of *Proteobacteria*), while AMPs cause an additional 19-24% of damage [5, 6, 20]. The culture-based method allowed for quantitative confirmation of the growth of *Enterobacteriaceae* (+44-68%) and a decline in colonization resistance (-26-36%) [15-17]. In the context of Uzbekistan, high resistance to fluoroquinolones and macrolides amplifies the negative effects of self-medication. The most significant shifts in shigellosis are associated with more pronounced mucosal inflammation [1, 21]. The limitations of the study include the use of a culture-based method (which does not cover the full spectrum of microbiota), the lack of long-term follow-up on recovery, and a relatively small sample size for each nosological entity. The results underscore the need for a change in clinical practice: avoiding empirical self-treatment with AMDs for the colitic form of AGI and mandating culture with susceptibility testing before prescribing etiotropic therapy [20-25].

Conclusion. The uncontrolled use of antimicrobial drugs (AMDs) at the prehospital stage (even for 1-3 days) significantly exacerbates dysbiotic shifts in the intestinal microbiota of patients with infectious colitis (total influence coefficient: 37-40%). The most significant changes are a decrease in protective flora, an increase in opportunistic *Enterobacteriaceae*, and a decline in the antagonistic activity of the microflora. The following is recommended: a

categorical refusal of self-treatment with AMDs in cases of suspected colitic forms of acute intestinal infection; mandatory microbiological confirmation of the diagnosis and pathogen susceptibility before initiating etiotropic therapy; and early administration of probiotics/prebiotics for dysbiosis correction in a hospital setting.

The "Big Three" opportunists in infectious colitis + AMDs have been identified: 1. *Enterobacteriaceae* (*E. coli* [hemolytic/lactose-negative], *Klebsiella*, *Enterobacter*, *Citrobacter*, *Proteus*) → *Proteobacteria* bloom → the main driver of dysbiosis. 2. *Candida spp.* → the fungal component, which intensifies when bacteria are suppressed. 3. *Clostridium difficile* → the most dangerous pathogen, specifically associated with antibiotic use.

These groups most often exceed normal limits (growth >1-2 log₁₀ CFU/g) and correlate with the severity of dysbiosis, the duration of bacterial shedding, and the risk of post-infectious complications (Table 4).

Table 4

Key pathogens (or opportunistic microorganisms) that play a central role in the development of intestinal dysbiosis, especially in cases of infectious colitis (salmonellosis, shigellosis, campylobacteriosis) and in the context of antibiotic therapy:

Microorganism / Group	Role in Dysbiosis	Typical Changes in Infectious Colitis + AM0044	Clinical Significance
Proteobacteria (in general)	The primary phylum that "blooms" during dysbiosis	↑ up to 30-50% of total biomass	Impaired barrier function, inflammation, risk of chronic disease and systemic complications

<p><i>Escherichia coli</i> (hemolytic and lactose-negative strains)</p>	<p>Opportunistic strains that often acquire virulence and resistance</p>	<p>↑ 2-5 fold, sometimes >4-5 log₁₀ CFU/g</p>	<p>Toxin production, invasion, risk of post-infectious IBS and sepsis</p>
<p><i>Klebsiella</i> spp.</p>	<p>A classic opportunist; produces a capsule and resistance enzymes</p>	<p>↑ by 25-50%</p>	<p>High virulence, risk of pneumonia, sepsis, and hypervirulent strains</p>
<p><i>Enterobacter</i> spp.</p>	<p>Selected for by antibiotics; produces β-lactamases</p>	<p>↑ by 40-60%</p>	<p>Resistance to cephalosporins, risk of hospital-acquired infections</p>
<p><i>Citrobacter</i> spp.</p>	<p>Often associated with antibiotic-resistant infections</p>	<p>↑ by 50-70%</p>	<p>Implicated in sepsis, meningitis, and urinary tract infections</p>

<p><i>Proteus</i> spp.</p>	<p>Highly motile, urease-positive, contributes to stone formation</p>	<p>↑ by 60-80%</p>	<p>Urinary tract infections, prolonged shedding, bacterial sepsis</p>
<p><i>Candida</i> spp.</p>	<p>Fungal opportunist; grows when bacterial flora is suppressed</p>	<p>↑ by 40-60%</p>	<p>Intestinal candidiasis, risk of systemic candidiasis in immunocompromised individuals</p>
<p>Coagulase-positive <i>Staphylococcus</i> spp.</p>	<p>Often <i>S. aureus</i> and coagulase-negative staphylococci</p>	<p>↑ by 40-60%</p>	<p>Risk of superinfection, antibiotic-resistant strains (MRSA)</p>
<p><i>Clostridium</i> spp. (some species)</p>	<p><i>C. difficile</i> is the classic pathogen of antibiotic-associated diarrhea</p>	<p>↑ with AMDs (especially clindamycin, cephalosporins)</p>	<p>Pseudomembranous colitis, severe diarrhea, toxic megacolon</p>

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