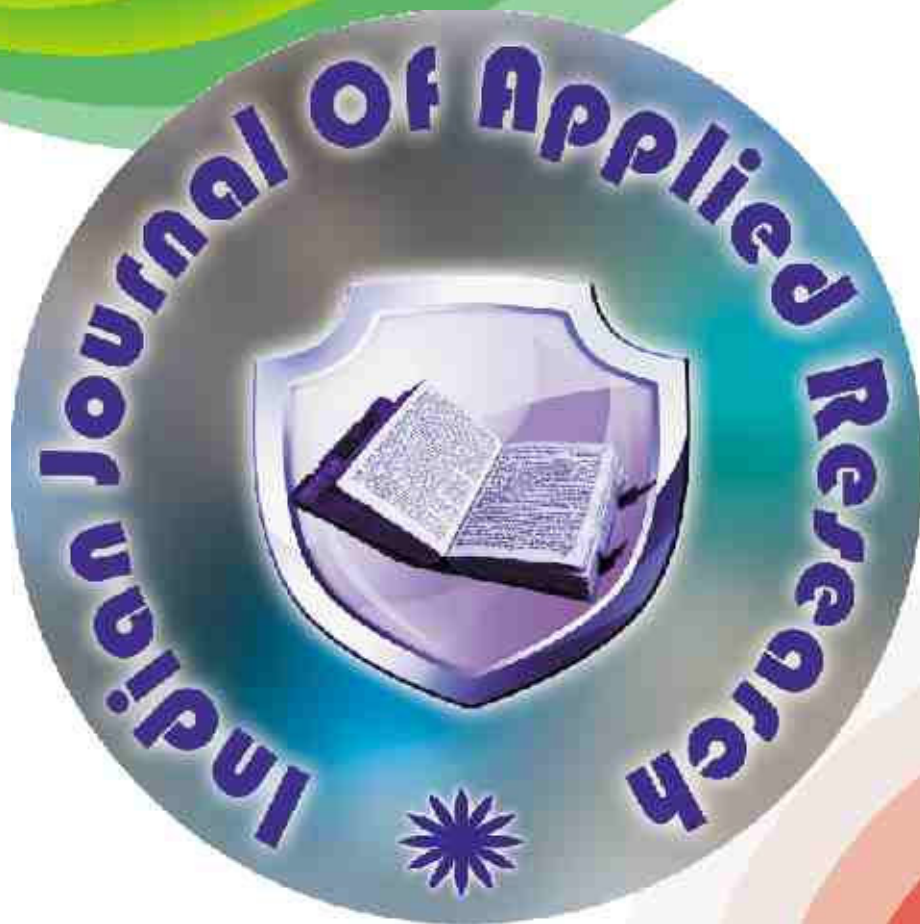


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## Pneumococcal Septic Arthritis in an Infant A Case Report

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### ABSTRACT

*Traditionally, Streptococcus pneumoniae is considered as a relatively uncommon cause of septic arthritis. Here, we describe a case of 6 months old infant who presented with septic arthritis of left knee joint. The purulent fluid aspirated from the joint & blood revealed Streptococcus pneumoniae on culture. No predisposing or underlying medical condition was found associated with infection.*

**Keywords : Streptococcus pneumoniae; septic arthritis; infant**

### Introduction:

Streptococcus pneumoniae is a gram positive diplococcus that frequently causes pneumonia, sinusitis, and otitis media, as well as more invasive diseases, such as sepsis, meningitis, arthritis, and a variety of other infections. High morbidity and mortality caused by pneumococcal infection in children and adults have been reported.<sup>1</sup>

The incidence of pneumococcal infection is high in neonates, infants, and toddlers, low in adolescents and young adults, and then increases again in the elderly.<sup>1</sup>

Pneumococcal septic arthritis is described as "rarely encountered" or "unusual". However, Streptococcus pneumoniae causes septic arthritis more often than is generally thought.<sup>2</sup> We describe the case of septic arthritis caused by Streptococcus pneumoniae in an infant.

### Case Report:

A previously healthy 6 months old female child was admitted to orthopaedic ward complaining of swelling, pain & immobility of the left knee since 7 days. The infant had no significant medical or surgical history. She had no allergies. Physical examination revealed a well developed & well nourished infant. She was alert and in mild distress.

Vital signs included the following:

Temperature 38 oC, pulse rate: 136/min. and respiratory rate: 32/min.

Neurologic, cardiovascular, pulmonary and abdominal examinations revealed normal findings.

Local examination revealed diffuse swelling throughout the left lower extremity extending from midfemoral area to left foot with focal swelling near the left knee. The left leg was painful to manipulation. The isolated movement of left knee was limited. Digital pulses were present. There were no signs of trauma.

Laboratory values were: Haemoglobin - 12 gm/dl, leukocyte count 22400/cumm with 66% neutrophils, 30% lymphocytes, 2% monocytes, 2% Eosinophils, platelet count 590000/cumm. The erythrocyte sedimentation rate and C-reactive protein (CRP) were elevated at 63 mm/hour and 62 mg/L respectively.

Radiograph of left femur and left knee showed soft tissue swelling without any evidence of fracture or bone involvement.

Approximately 2-3ml of grossly purulent fluid was aspirated and subjected to microbiological examination- Gram stain, culture and antibiotic sensitivity testing. Gram's stain revealed gram-positive cocci in pairs. At the same time blood is also subjected to culture. Fluid and blood grew Streptococcus pneumoniae on culture and both the strains found sensitive to penicillin and third generation cephalosporins.

Empirical intravenous antimicrobial therapy consisting of Amikacin and Augmentin was instituted before the determination of antibiotic susceptibilities.

The infant had surgical irrigation and debridement of the left knee. Frank pus was aspirated with an elevated cell count but exploration of knee joint revealed no signs of chondral or osseous damage.

Postoperatively the patient remained afebrile for 48 hours and CRP decreased after 6 weeks. Range of motion and function of left knee also returned to normal on follow up examination.

### Discussion:

Infections by Streptococcus pneumoniae cause substantial morbidity worldwide. It has been reported that this bacterium causes more than 50% of cases of community-acquired pneumonia admitted to hospitals and 20-40% of all pyogenic meningitis.<sup>3</sup> Septic arthritis in paediatric population can occur from infection by several bacteria including Staphylococcus aureus, Group A Streptococcus, Neisseria meningitidis, Streptococcus pneumoniae, Neisseria gonorrhoeae, Klebsiella and Staphylococcus epidermidis.<sup>4</sup>

Septic arthritis caused by S. Pneumoniae has traditionally been thought to occur infrequently. However literature suggests it may account for 6-10% cases of septic arthritis.<sup>5</sup>

The first case of Streptococcus pneumoniae septic arthritis was reported in 1888.<sup>6</sup> The incidence of septic arthritis in children varies from 1.2% to 5.5%.<sup>7</sup>

In the present case, the age of the child was 6 months. Literature suggests that the invasive pneumococcal infections are frequently seen in children aged less than 2 years.



71 out of 156 children with invasive pneumococcal infection in an Invasive Bacterial Infection Surveillance (IBIS)<sup>3</sup> study in India and 6 out of 7 children having pneumococcal septic arthritis in another study from Nottingham, United Kingdom,<sup>7</sup> were younger than 2 years.

In children, monoarticular involvement is seen. Involvement of the hip joint is most common followed by involvement of the knee, elbow and ankle with decreasing frequency.<sup>2,7</sup> In the present case, infant presented with left knee joint involvement.

For septic arthritis to develop there is usually a primary focus to begin with, common sites for *S. Pneumoniae* being pneumonia and meningitis. From there haematogenous spread to the joint can occur.<sup>5</sup>

In young infants, the primary focus of infection may occasionally be osteomyelitis in the metaphysis or epiphysis, which may then spread to the adjacent joint.<sup>7</sup>

However, in most of the studies no primary focus has been identified.<sup>2,4,7</sup> It is documented since 1914 that pneumococcal arthritis may be "primary." Probably, septic arthritis occurs because of seeding of the joint with organism during transient bacteraemia from a mucous membrane source.<sup>2</sup> Cell surface components and extracellular products facilitate streptococcal tissue invasion.<sup>8</sup>

While *Streptococcus pneumoniae* is often part of the normal nasopharyngeal flora of healthy children, increased pathogenicity of pneumococci in the paediatric population may be due to low titres of type-specific opsonocytotoxic antibody.<sup>4</sup> In the present case, the child was healthy previously and no focus of pneumococcal infection could be detected.

According to the literature, risk factors identified in children for pneumococcal septic arthritis are sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, HIV infection, and X-linked agammaglobulinaemia, asplenia, splenosis, deficiencies in humoral (B cell) immunity, and complement deficiencies.<sup>1,2</sup> However, no underlying predisposing medical condition was found in the present case. Similar reports have been documented by Ispahani et al and Lane et al.<sup>4,7</sup>

The clinical significance of penicillin resistance in the pneumococcus is unclear. The prevalence of penicillin resistant *Streptococcus pneumoniae* has steadily increased

throughout the world. 33% of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* isolates within United States have some degree of resistance to penicillin.<sup>4</sup> However, the studies did not show an increase in mortality that was associated with high level pneumococcal beta lactam resistance.<sup>2</sup> Penicillin resistance is rare in India but antimicrobial resistance patterns will require continued monitoring.<sup>3</sup> In the present study, isolate of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* was found susceptible to Penicillin and third generation Cephalosporins.

The review study<sup>2</sup> shows that 89% of the serotypes of pneumococcal isolates causing septic arthritis were represented in the 23-valent pneumococcal vaccine. Many cases of pneumococcal septic arthritis are, therefore, potentially vaccine preventable. In the face of invasive pneumococcal infection and the rising incidence of pneumococcal strains resistant to  $\geq 1$  antimicrobial agents, consideration should be given to greater use of the existing 23-valent polysaccharide vaccine.<sup>7</sup> The infant in the present case was not vaccinated against *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.

In most of the reports of pneumococcal septic arthritis<sup>2,4,7</sup> the children had good outcomes compared to the poor outcomes of septic arthritis caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*<sup>2</sup> It is also seen that whatever be the treatment intervention (surgical incision and drainage, arthrocentesis, or arthroscopic drainage), the outcome remained similar. Intra-articular antibiotics are not recommended because of the risk of developing chemical synovitis.<sup>2</sup> The 6 months old infant in the present study also responded well to antibiotics & surgical debridement and regained back the left knee joint function and mobility.

In summary, although pneumococcal arthritis was thought to be uncommon, the till date reports suggest that the pneumococcus is a relatively common cause of septic arthritis. It should not only be considered in cases of concomitant pulmonary and/or meningeal and joint infection, especially in the presence of predisposing factors but it is also an important cause of septic arthritis in an infant which is healthy and without any associated predisposing medical condition. Due consideration is needed to be given to the greater use of the existing 23-valent polysaccharide vaccine.

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