

TEMPORAL ASPECTS OF CHANGES IN NEURAL TUBE DEFECT RATES: REPLY TO DR. HOOK

To the Editor:

Regarding Dr. Hook's comments, we would like to point out that distribution of neural tube defect (NTD) cases is not homogeneous throughout the year. Annual and seasonal variations in birth prevalence of NTDs have been reported by several authors (Mc Donnell et al., 1999; Buccimazza et al., 1994; Brazeau et al., 1992; Dallaire et al., 1984).

In our study, we started an active surveillance system and registry in 1999. In that year we found that there was a higher incidence of cases during the months of June through September and a lower incidence from October through December. For this reason, we think that the early decline in the number of cases observed 2 months after the initiation of the campaign is not due to the effect of folic acid but corresponds to the decline expected during that time of the year, as can be observed in 2000 and 2001 (Fig. 1). The incidence rates in the months of October through December ranged from 0.46–0.82 per 1000 in 1999, from 0.35–0.48 per 1000 in 2000, and from 0.12–0.79 per 1000 in 2001, which shows a decrease (Table 1) in the last 2 years.

The decline in the number of cases observed is more evident in June 2000 (Figure 1), 10 months after the initiation of the campaign. If we compare the number of cases and the incidence rates from June through September in

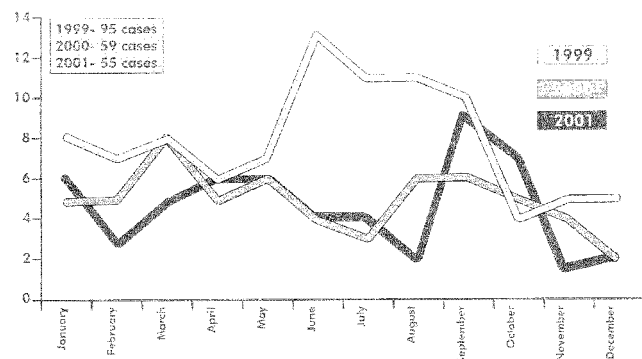


Figure 1. Decline in the incidence of NTD cases in Nuevo León, México (1999–2001).

Table 1
NTD's Incidence Rates by Month*

	1999	2000	2001
January	0.92	0.56	0.68
February	0.99	0.62	0.37
March	1.17	1.07	0.59
April	0.89	1.0	1.2
May	1.16	0.67	0.67
June	1.6	0.5	0.5
July	1.4	0.3	0.49
August	1.3	0.79	0.23
September	1.19	0.6	1.19
October	0.46	0.45	0.79
November	0.55	0.48	0.12
December	0.82	0.35	0.36

*Cases $\times$ 1000.

1999 and 2001, there is a significant reduction. During this period, incidence rates ranged from 1.2–1.6 per 1000 in 1999, from 0.3–0.8 per 1000 in 2000, and from 0.5–1.2 per 1000 in 2001.

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