



Neuroparasitology and Tropical Neurology: Chapter 10. Infections with free-living amoebae (Handbook of Clinical Neurology)

Govinda S. Visvesvara

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Acanthamoeba spp., Balamuthia mandrillaris, and Naegleria fowleri are mitochondria-bearing, free-living eukaryotic amebae that have been known to cause infections of the central nervous system (CNS) of humans and other animals. Several species of Acanthamoeba belonging to several different genotypes cause an insidious and chronic disease, granulomatous amebic encephalitis (GAE), principally in immunocompromised hosts including persons infected with HIV/AIDS. Acanthamoeba spp., belonging to mostly group 2, also cause infection of the human cornea, Acanthamoeba keratitis. Balamuthia mandrillaris causes GAE in both immunocompromised and immunocompetent hosts mostly in the very young or very old individuals. Both Acanthamoeba spp. and B. mandrillaris also cause a disseminated disease including the lungs, skin, kidneys, and uterus. Naegleria fowleri, on the other hand, causes an acute and fulminating, necrotizing infection of the CNS called primary amebic meningoencephalitis (PAM) in children and young adults with a history of recent exposure to warm fresh water. Additionally, another free-living ameba Sappinia pedata, previously described as S. diploidea, also has caused a single case of amebic meningoencephalitis. In this review the biology of these amebae, clinical manifestations, molecular and immunological diagnosis, and epidemiological features associated with GAE and PAM are discussed.

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