

Fifty Kenyan patients with chronic liver disease or hepatocellular carcinoma were tested for hepatitis B surface antigenaemia by radioimmunoassay. The hepatitis B surface antigen was detected in 77% of the patients with chronic persistent or chronic aggressive hepatitis, or cirrhosis confirmed by liver biopsy, compared with 15% in a control group. All six patients with hepatocellular carcinoma had detectable hepatitis B surface antigen or antibody. 50% of the controls had hepatitis B surface antibody in their plasma detectable by haemagglutination. Auto-immune associated liver disease appeared infrequent. The possibility that the hepatitis B virus is an important cause of cirrhosis in Kenya is discussed.