



## Analysis of Risk Factors for Mucormycosis in COVID-19 Patients Admitted in Tertiary Care Hospital Aurangabad

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### Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

### Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/AJMAH/2022/v20i11755

### Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/92600>

Original Research Article

Received 08 August 2022  
Accepted 17 October 2022  
Published 19 October 2022

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Mucormycosis manifests as various syndromes in human beings, particularly in immunocompromised patients and those with diabetes mellitus. Recently, several cases of mucormycosis in people with COVID-19 have been increasingly reported worldwide, especially from India. This prompted us to conduct a study in mucormycosis patients with COVID-19, to know its clinical profile of the COVID-19 patients with mucormycosis and identify of various risk factors in mucormycosis patients with COVID-19 infection.

**Materials and Methods:** This Cross sectional Retrospective Qualitative Descriptive study was conducted in Department of Medicine, MGM Medical College and Hospital, Aurangabad [Maharashtra]. A total of 100 patients admitted from April 2021 to August 2021 were enrolled as study participants. All COVID-19 patients admitted in MGM who are diagnosed with mucormycosis by microbiologically (KOH mount) or radiologically (CT/MRI) or by histopathology.

**Observations and Results:** The mean age of patients was 59.72±12.47 years. The male 73 (73.0%) predominance than female 27(27.0%). 88(88.0%) of patients were having Diabetic Mellitus and 31(31.0%) of patients were having hypertension. All the patients were given Antibiotic

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& steroids during treatment of COVID-19 at hospitalisation. 15(15.0%) of patients were admitted in ICU during treatment of COVID-19. 76(76.0%) patients were required Oxygen, 03(3.0%) were on NIV/Ventilator and 08 (8.0%) patients were on HFOT during treatment of COVID-19. Overall (97.0%) of patients were recovered.

**Conclusion:** Diabetes mellitus is identified as the leading underlying comorbidity in cases diagnosed with mucormycosis in post COVID-19 patients. Also use of steroid, duration of use of steroid, and oxygen therapy during the treatment of COVID-19 were risk factors observed in the patients with mucormycosis.

**Keywords:** Mucormycosis; steroid in COVID-19; post-COVID-19.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mucormycosis is manifested by a variety of different syndromes in humans, particularly in immunocompromised patients and those with diabetes mellitus. Devastating rhino-orbital-cerebral and pulmonary infections are the most common syndromes caused by these fungi.

“Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory distress syndrome. It has been associated with a wide range of opportunistic bacterial and fungal infection” [1]. “Both Aspergillosis and candida have been reported as the main fungal infections in patients with COVID-19” [2]. Recently, several cases of mucormycosis in people with COVID19 have been increasingly reported worldwide, especially from India. The main reason that appears to be facilitating mucorales spores to germinate in patients with COVID-19 is favourable conditions of low oxygen (hypoxia), high glucose(diabetes, new onset hyperglycemia, steroid induced hyperglycemia), acidic medium (metabolic acidosis, diabetic ketoacidosis [DKA] ),high iron levels(increased ferritins) and decreased phagocytic activity of WBC due to immune suppression along with several other risk factors like prolonged hospitalization with or without mechanical ventilators.

“The genera in the order mucorales are responsible for causing Mucormycosis in humans. These organisms are universal in nature and can be found on decaying vegetations and in the soil. These fungi grow rapidly and release large numbers of spores which are air borne. Because the agents of mucormycosis are common in the environment hence they are most common contaminants in the clinical microbiology laboratory; all humans have plenty of exposure to these fungi during day to day activities. The fact that

mucormycosis is a rare human infection reflects the effectiveness of the intact human immune system. This is further supported by the finding that almost all human infections due to the agents of mucormycosis occur in the presence of some underlying compromising condition” [2].

“The genera most commonly found in human infections are *Rhizopus*, *Mucor* and *Rhizomucor*, *Cunninghamella*, *Absidia Saksenaea*, and *Apophysomyces* genera that are less commonly implicated in infection. *Rhizopus oryzae* is most common type and responsible for nearly 60% of mucormycosis cases in humans and also accounts for 90% of Rhino-orbital –cerebral (ROCM) form” [3].

“Globally, the prevalence of mucormycosis varied from 0.005-1.7 per million population, while its prevalence is nearly 80 times higher (0.14 per 1000) in India compared to developed countries in a recent estimate of year 2019-20” [4,5,6] “in other words, India has highest cases of mucormycosis in the world. Notwithstanding, India is already having second largest population with diabetes mellitus (DM) and was the diabetes capital of the world, until recently. Importantly, DM has been the most common risk factor linked with mucormycosis in India, although haematological malignancies and organ transplant takes the lead in Europe and USA” [7].

While long term use of corticosteroids has often been associated with several opportunistic fungal infections including aspergillosis and mucormycosis [8], even a short course of corticosteroids has recently been reported to link with mucormycosis especially in people with DM. A total prednisolone dose of more than 600mg or total methyl prednisolone dose of 2-7gm given during the month before, puts immunocompromised patients at risk of mucormycosis [9]. The case reports of mucormycosis resulting from even a short course

(5-14 days) of steroid therapy in patients of DM are rare [10]. "Surprisingly 46% of the patients had received corticosteroids within the month before the diagnosis of mucormycosis in the European Confederation of Medical Mycology study" [11].

"These findings need to be considered with respect to COVID-19 pandemic where corticosteroids are commonly used. There has been a rampant rise in case reports/series of mucormycosis patients with COVID-19 infection especially in India. Similarly, several case reports are being reported from various continents. These findings are unprecedented and are of great public health importance especially because there is high fatality rate with mucormycosis. Intracranial involvement of mucormycosis increases the fatality rate to as high as 90%" [12].

Moreover, rapidity of dissemination of mucormycosis is an extraordinary phenomenon and even a delay of 12 hours in the diagnosis could be fatal, the reason 50% of cases of mucormycosis have been historically diagnosed only in the post-mortem autopsy series. This prompted us to conduct a study in mucormycosis patients with COVID-19, to know its clinical profile of the COVID-19 patients with mucormycosis and identify of various risk factors in mucormycosis patients with COVID-19 infection.

### 1.1 Aim and Objectives

- To study the clinical profile of the COVID-19 patients with mucormycosis
- To identify the various risk factors in mucormycosis patients with COVID-19 infection.
- To study the outcome of mucormycosis patients in COVID-19 infection.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Study Design

Cross sectional Retrospective Qualitative Descriptive study.

### 2.2 Study Area

Department of Medicine, MGM Medical College and Hospital, Aurangabad [Maharashtra], India.

### 2.3 Sample Size

100 mucormycosis patients

### 2.4 Study Duration

A total of 100 patients admitted from April 2021 to August 2021 were enrolled as study participants.

### 2.5 Inclusion Criteria

All COVID-19 patients admitted in MGM who are diagnosed with mucormycosis by microbiologically (KOH mount) or radiologically (CT/MRI) or by histopathology.

### 2.6 Exclusion Criteria

- COVID-19 patients with mucormycosis who were not willing to participate in study.

### 2.7 Elimination Criteria

All COVID-19 patients who are microbiologically and radiological diagnosed to have Mucormycosis but have failed to follow up.

### 2.8 Methodology

After getting ethical permission from ethics committee of MGM Medical College & Hospital, Aurangabad [MH], India, data was collected from COVID-19 with mucormycosis patients who satisfying inclusion and exclusion criterion of study. The purpose of the study was explained to the study participants. Only after their written consent patients were enrolled in the study. Confidentiality of the information was ensured. For the purpose of data collection a detailed proforma was prepared. The proforma was included demographic profile (Name, age, sex and BMI), Personal history, comorbidity and detailed history of COVID-19, treatment during COVID-19.

Also diagnosis method of mucormycosis patients, patients according to involvement, anti-fungals received surgical intervention and outcome of mucormycosis patients.

### 2.9 Statistical Analysis

The collected data was entered in Microsoft excel and analysed using SPSS version 24<sup>th</sup>. Mean and SD was calculated for quantitative variables and proportions were calculated for categorical variables.

### 3. RESULTS

In present study out of 100 patients, maximum patients i.e. 49 (49.0%) were from age more than 60 years, 40(40.0%) were age-group of 45-60 years and only 11(11.0%) of patients were from age-group 15-45 years. The mean age of patients was 59.72±12.47 years. The male 73 (73.0%) predominance than female 27(27.0%).

In present study, 88(88.0%) of patients were having Diabetic Mellitus, 31(31.0%) of patients were having hypertension and 12(12.0%) of patients were having CHD/IHD, one patient was having Hypothyroidism and Asthma.

In present study, all 100(100%) of patients were diagnosed on Imaging and 55(55.0%) were positive on KOH and 36(36.0%) patients were positive on histopathology.

All 100 patients were reported Sinuses involvement, 70(70.0%) patients were having ocular, 02(2.0%) Pulmonary and 03(3.0%) patients were having cerebral involvement.

All the patients were given Antibiotic & steroids during treatment of COVID-19 at hospitalisation. 15(15.0%) of patients were admitted in ICU during treatment of COVID-19. 76(76.0%) patients were required Oxygen, 03(3.0%) were on NIV/Ventilator and 08 (8.0%) patients were on HFOT during treatment of COVID-19. 67 (67.0%) patients were used steroids for COVID-19 treatment for 6–10 days, 28(28.0%) study participants used steroids for 11-15 days. Where as 5(5.0%) patients were used steroids more than 15 days.

All the 100 patients were given Posaconazole & Amphotericin, 17(17%) & 16(16.0%) patients were given Liposomal Amphotericin and Lyophilized Amphotericin respectively. 67(67.0%) of patients were given Lipid Emulsion Amphotericin.

All the patients required Functional endoscopic sinus surgery (FESS), 78 (78.0%) of patients were done Endoscopic Debridement where as 16(16.0%) patients done Maxillectomy.

Out of 100 patients 97(97.0%) of patients were recovered and 03(3.0%) were died during treatment of mucormycosis.

### 4. DISCUSSION

In present study out of 100 patients, maximum patients i.e. 49 (49.0%) were from age more than 60 years, 40(40.0%) were age-group of 45-60 years and only 11(11.0%) of patients were from age-group 15-45 years. The mean age of patients was 59.72±12.47 years. Similar findings was reported by Bhagyashri Jadhav et al. [13] “the mean age was 54.46±13.13, years ranging from 28 to 77 years”. Also Ganesh Lokhande et al [14] observed “mean age of the patient was 52.47 ±12.84 years with a minimum age of 26 and maximum age of 83 years”. Study conducted by Sen et al. [15] observed that “the mean age of the study participants was 51.9”. A study conducted by Gupta [16] revealed that “the mean age of the study participants was 50 years. Maximum study reported mean age of mucormycosis patients were above 50 years”.

**Table 1. Distribution of patients according to demographic profile of patients**

		No. of patients	Percentage
<b>Age-group in years</b>	15-45	11	11.0
	45-60	40	40.0
	>60	49	49.0
	Total	100	100%
	Mean±SD	59.72±12.47 years	
<b>Gender</b>	Male	73	73.0
	Female	27	27.0

**Table 2. Distribution of patients according to co-morbidities**

Comorbidities	No. of patients (n=100)	Percentage
Hypertension	31	31.0
Diabetic Mellitus	88	88.0
IHD/CHD	12	12.0
Hypothyroidism	01	01.0
Asthama	01	01.0

**Table 3. Distribution of patients according to diagnosis method**

Diagnosis method	No. of patients (n=100)	Percentage
KOH	55	55.0
Histopathology	36	36.0
Imaging	100	100.0

**Table 4. Distribution of patients according to involvement**

Involvement	No. of patients (n=100)	Percentage
Sinuses	100	100.0%
Occular	70	70.0%
Pulmonary	02	02.0%
Cerebral	03	03.0%

In present study the male 73 (73.0%) predominance than female 27(27.0%). Similar male predominance was observed by Patel et al [17] 69.5% of participants affected by mucormycosis were men. Sen et al. [15] observed 71% of the male. Bhagyashri Jadhav et al [13] Observed 75% of male patients. , Lokhande GS et al [14] also reported 61.34% were males.

In present study, 88.0% of mucormycosis patients were having Diabetic Mellitus. John et al. [18] observed that 94% of the patients with mucormycosis were diabetic. In 73.5% of cases with mucormycosis, diabetes was observed as a risk factor in India [19]. Sen et al. [15] observed that 78% of the patients with mucormycosis were having diabetes. 77% found by Priya et al. [20] In contrast to the findings in this study, Lokhande GS et al [14] reported (57%) were diabetic. COVID-19 cases with a history of diabetes are at increased risk of developing the severe disease and these patients are also at higher risk of fungal infections. Globally diabetes mellitus is identified as the leading underlying

comorbidity in cases diagnosed with mucormycosis in post COVID-19 patients [21].

In present study 76.0% patients were required Oxygen, 3.0% were on NIV/Ventilator and 8.0% patients were on HFOT during treatment of COVID-19. Similarly Sen et al. [15] observed that 79% of the patients with mucormycosis received O2 therapy for the treatment of COVID-19. Whereas Afroze SN et al [22] reported 80.22%. Whereas Bhagyashri Jadhav et al. [13] reported 18.75% patients gave the history of receiving oxygen or mechanical ventilation during the treatment of COVID-19.

In present study, all 100 patients were given steroids during treatment of COVID-19 at hospitalisation. Lokhande, et al [13] found that more than 90% of patients had a history of steroid use for the treatment of COVID-19. Also Sen et al. [15] revealed a history of use of steroids in 87% of patients admitted with mucormycosis. Use of corticosteroids was observed in 88% of the study participants with mucormycosis in the study conducted by John et al. [18]. In present study (67.0%) patients were used steroids for COVID-19 treatment for 6–10 days, (28.0%) study participants used steroids for 11-15 days. Where as (5.0%) patients were used steroids more than 15 days. Lokhande, et al [14] reported “(77.11%) study participants used steroids for COVID-19 treatment for 7–14 days, whereas (20.48%) study participants used steroids for less than 7 days. The National Institute of Health recommends the use of dexamethasone (6 mg per day for a maximum of 10 days) in patients who are ventilated or require supplemental oxygen but not in milder cases. 17 The guidelines specifically mention the risk of developing a secondary infection”.

In present study, all (100%) of patients were diagnosed on Imaging and (55.0%) were positive on KOH and (36.0%) patients were positive on histopathology. Lokhande, et al. [14] reported 57.14% of patients found positive on KOH.

In this study, All 100 patients were reported Sinuses involvement, (70.0%) patients were having ocular, (2.0%) Pulmonary and (3.0%) patients were having cerebral involvement. Singh et al. [22] found that 88.9% of Sinuses involvement, ocular (1.0%), Pulmonary (7.9%) and Cerebral (22.2%).

**Table 5. Distribution of patients according to treatment during COVID-19**

		No. of patients(n=100)	Percentage
Antibiotic		100	100.0%
Steroid		100	100.0%
ICU admission		15	15.0%
Oxygen requirement		76	76.0%
NIV/ventilator		03	3.0%
HFOT		08	8.0%
No. of days steroid given in COVID-19	0-5 Days	00	00
	6-10 Days	67	67.0%
	11-15 Days	28	28.0%
	>15 Days	5	5.0%

**Table 6. Distribution of patients according to anti-fungals received**

Antifungals received	No. of patients (n=100)	Percentage
Posaconazole	100	100.0
Amphotericin	100	100.0
Liposomal amphotericin	17	17.0
Lipid emulsion amphotericin	67	67.0
Lyophilized amphotericin	16	16.0

**Table 7. Distribution of patients according to surgical intervention**

Surgical intervention	No. of patients (n=100)	Percentage
Functional Endoscopic Sinus Surgery (FESS)	100	100.0%
Endoscopic debridement	78	78.0%
Maxillectomy	16	16.0%

**Table 8. Distribution of patients according to Outcome**

Surgical intervention	No. of patients (n=100)	Percentage
Recovered	97	97.0%
Death	03	3.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

In present study All the patients required Functional endoscopic sinus surgery (FESS), 78 (78.0%) of patients were done Endoscopic

Debridement where as 16(16.0%) patients done Maxillectomy. Whereas contrast finding was reported by Bhagyashri Jadhav et al [13] that in “(25%) patients only medical line of treatment was sufficient whereas (62.5%) patients required surgical debridement during the treatment. In our study, (97.0%) of patients were recovered and (3.0%) were died during treatment of mucormycosis”. Bhagyashri Jadhav et al. [13] reported Overall survival was 90.62%.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In Post COVID-19 patients, Mucormycosis is one of the complications observed in the later stage of the disease. Diabetes mellitus is identified as the leading underlying comorbidity in cases diagnosed with mucormycosis in post COVID-19 patients. Also use of steroid, duration of use of steroid, and oxygen therapy during the treatment of COVID-19 were risk factors observed in the patients with mucormycosis. A high clinical suspicion and early and accurate diagnosis of AIFR in COVID-19 patients are essential for better prognosis.

## 6. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The study doesn't do justice in the aspect that it doesn't include all the cases of Mucormycosis on a single based criteria, i.e some are included on the basis of histopathology, while some on the basis of microbiology and the rest on basis of radiological diagnosis.

## CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, patient (s) written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study is subjected for approval to “Ethical Committee” of MGM Medical College & Hospital Aurangabad [MH], India.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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