

Lecture Notes on the Infectious Diseases

Biology 2420
Lecture Notes

Infectious Diseases Affecting the Gastrointestinal System

Defense Mechanisms of the Gastrointestinal System

The digestive system has a very heavy load of microorganisms and encounters millions of microbes everyday. Defense against infection is an important consideration due to the heavy presence of many different types of microbes present.

1. The gastrointestinal system is composed of a long tube extending from the mouth to the anus and four accessory organs. The alimentary canal consists of the mouth, pharynx, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, rectum, and anus. The accessory organs are the salivary glands, liver, gallbladder, and pancreas. The accessory organs produce fluids and enzymes that aid in the digestive process.
2. All intestinal surfaces are coated with a layer of mucous which confers a mechanical defense.
3. Secretory IgA can be found on most intestinal surfaces providing a localized specific immunity.
4. The muscular walls of the digestive tract keep food and microbes moving through the system by peristaltic action.
5. Various fluids associated with the GI tract have antimicrobial action. Saliva contains lysozyme and lactoferrin. Stomach fluids are inhibitory to most microbes due to the high degree of acidity attributable to hydrochloric acid secretion.

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