Acute gastroenteritis (AGE) is a major cause of childhood morbidity and mortality worldwide. Among the viruses that cause AGE the sapoviruses (SaVs), members of the Caliciviridae family, seems to be very important since they are associated with sporadic cases and outbreaks of AGE occurring in schools, day care centers and cruise ships. The most frequently observed symptoms on a SaV infection are diarrhea, vomiting and abdominal pain. The virus transmission occurs by the fecal-oral route, primarily through contact person-to-person, intake of contaminated water and/or food, and aerosolized particles generated during episodes of vomiting. The study aimed to detect and genotype SaVs in fecal samples from hospitalized children with and without gastroenteritis in São Luís, MA, during the period of June 1997 to June 1999. Nucleic acids were extracted from SaVs by the silica method and were subsequently tested by RT-PCR using the primers pair P289 and P290. Specimens were considered positive when showing amplicons of 331 bp. The positivity rate was 8.1% (11/136), with 15.2% (7/46) in the diarrheal specimens and 4.4% (4/90) in non-diarrheal ones (p <0.04). One sample was sequenced and classified as GII.1. Of the positive cases, 27.3% were associated with fever, vomiting and anorexia, and 18.2% with fever, anorexia and abdominal pain. The presence of asymptomatic cases reinforces the suggestion that even in the absence of clinical symptoms the virus continues to spread. SaVs detection in samples of children under two years corroborates published data that this age group is the most affected, as well as the highest percentage of positive cases are in the group with clinical manifestation. The genotype found (GII.1) in this study was also detected in Belém, in samples of diarrheic children collected in different years (1998-2000 and 2003) and in Parauapebas in 2006, both in Pará state. Therefore, the results of this research are relevant as they demonstrate the circulation of SaVs in São Luís and reinforce that further studies should be developed, as there is still lack of information regarding the epidemiology of this virus. Financial Support: PIBIC/CNPq

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