Blood was drawn at admission to the emergency room, after acquiring the appropriate informed consent (explaining to the patients the aims of the study and ensuring them the complete anonymity of the data collected). Each sample consisted of 8-10 cc of peripheral blood and was immediately ultra-centrifuged for about 10-15 minutes at 1300 RCF. Serum samples were then subdivided in small aliquots (about 500-600 microliters each), and immediately stored at -80 °C.