

Short Communications

Allergic contact dermatitis from a boxwood recorder

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Case Report

A 65-year-old man presented with a 4-month history of hyperkeratotic eczema with painful fissures of his fingertips. There was no history of atopy or skin diseases. Initially, endogenous hyperkeratotic eczema was diagnosed and the patient treated with topical corticosteroids with minor improvement. At the 2nd visit, however, the patient mentioned that the eczema was aggravated each time that he played his wooden recorder. The symptoms had started a few months after renewing his hobby of playing the recorder. He used, at random, recorders made from boxwood, cedar or rosewood.

Patch testing with the European standard series was negative. Samples of boxwood, cedarwood and rosewood were kindly provided by the manufacturer, filed into sawdust, and ether (diethylether) extracts prepared. Additional patch testing of these samples as sawdust suspended in petrol, or as ether extract, produced positive patch tests to boxwood: sawdust D2 +, D3 +; ether extract: D2 ?+, D3+. Cedarwood and rosewood were negative, as were 2 brands of recorder varnish (tested as is). Boxwood, patch tested as sawdust or ether extract, was negative in 6 healthy controls.

After these findings, the patient stopped playing his boxwood recorder but continued playing the others. His eczema resolved completely and topical treatment was no longer required. He had never had cheilitis

after playing his boxwood recorder, because its mouthpiece was made of cedarwood.

Discussion

European boxwood comes from *Buxus sempervirens*, belonging to the family Buxaceae. It is a slowly growing evergreen shrub, becoming a small tree under favourable conditions. It is native to Mediterranean Europe and also cultivated as an ornamental plant. Several kinds of boxwood are used in the manufacture of musical instruments, notably recorders. Also used are cedarwood and rosewood, but boxwood recorders are considered to be the best. Sometimes recorders are varnished, though this lowers the quality of the instrument.

A previous report (1) describes asthma due to boxwood sawdust (Type I allergy), and another (2) mentions dermatitis from leaves of this plant, probably irritant (3). To our knowledge, this is the first well-documented report of delayed-type allergy to boxwood, used in a musical instrument.

References

1. Markin L E. Boxwood sensitiveness. *J. Allergy* 1930; 1: 346.
2. Oppenheim M. Baumdermatitis bei einem gartner. *Ostern* 1913; 25: 1291.
3. Lovell C R. *Plants and the skin*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993: 52-53.

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