

Letter to the Editor

An epidemic of allergic contact dermatitis from epilating products

Dear Sir

Over the last 10 months, Revidal, a system established by the French Contact Dermatitis Group to collect data on allergic reactions to environmental agents (1), has received 23 reports (13 from France and 10 from Belgium), of acute allergic contact dermatitis from Veet[®] epilating products, manufactured by Reckitt Benkiser (France). The specific products to which the patients became sensitized were Cire froide[®], an epilatory wax, or Perfect Roll On[®] wax, as well as the accompanying tissue Lingette finition parfaite[®]. The reactions started on the legs and spread to other parts of the body (especially the face) and consisted of erythema, edema, vesicles, and sometimes bullae. Occasionally, the eruption had an urticarial or follicular aspect.

The detailed histories of all the patients are not yet known, but in at least 4 patients, the reactions were so severe that they were hospitalized via the Emergency Unit and even more patients required, besides topical therapy, systemic corticosteroids. In at least 6 patients, primary sensitization occurred after the very 1st application, since the products had never been used before and the eruption started 2 to 3 weeks later.

In 13 patients, patch tests were performed and showed strong positive reactions in 12, to both the wax and the tissue; in the 1 case, only a reaction to the latter was seen. Ingredients have thus far been tested in 6 cases, and positive reactions were found in 5 to modified-rosin or modified-colophonium derivatives in the wax, tested at 20% pet. (rosin or colophonium in the standard series remaining negative, except in 1 case). Methoxy PEG-22/dodecyl glycol copolymer (10% pet.), present at 20% in the tissue, was positive in the 5 cases tested with it, 1 of these having reacted to the tissue only. In 1 case, the fragrance from the tissue (1% eth.) and in 1 case, the fragrance (1% eth.) of the wax, as well as peppermint oil (10% pet.) present in both the wax and the tissue, were also positive. 2 subjects also reacted to lauryl alcohol from the tissue, tested at 10% pet.

Contact allergy to rosin (colophonium) and derivatives in cosmetic (and many other) products, including depilatory waxes (2, 3), is well-known, and a case similar to ours has recently been reported from Italy (4). As in the present cases, tests with unmodified rosin (in the standard series) are often negative in patients who react to modified-rosin derivatives (2, 4, 5), the latter probably being more potent sensitizers (2).

Because of the widespread use of epilating products, the relatively large number of reactions (some following the very 1st application) over a short period of time, and the severity of the dermatitis seen, these cases deserve the attention of all practitioners.

Yours sincerely

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