

Letter to the Editor

Systemic allergic dermatitis syndrome caused by mercury

Dear Sir,

In their interesting report on mercury exanthem associated with exposure to mercury vapour released from a broken thermometer, Belhadjali et al. (1) wrote that their patient developed the 'baboon syndrome' 3 weeks after exposure to mercury and thought this latency to be the longest reported in literature. We would like to raise some points about their case report.

First, an article of ours (2), not cited by the authors, described a case of burning mouth syndrome associated with the 'baboon syndrome' occurring 3 months after the insertion of a mercury-containing dental amalgam filling. In this report, we suggested that the systemic allergic dermatitis syndrome (baboon syndrome), triggered by exposure and sensitization to elemental mercury, may not be limited to the first weeks of exposure to it. The onset of clinical manifestations may be delayed from weeks to months (3).

Second, we were surprised to read that the patient was treated with oral corticosteroids. The appropriate early management of mercury exposure is stopping mercury exposure and careful monitoring (4).

Third, we understand that the reference range for normal concentrations of total mercury in blood is <50 nmol/l and <100 nmol/l for urine, respectively (5). The patient had only slightly elevated levels of total mercury in both initial blood (56 nmol/l, toxic level >250 nmol/l) and spot urine (15 nmol/l, toxic level >50 nmol/l).

In their informative case report, Belhadjali et al. do remind us that exposure to mercury should be considered for any cases of 'baboon syndrome'.

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