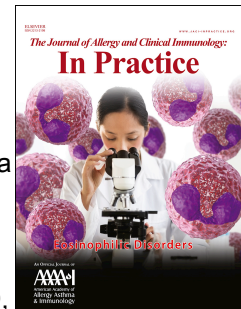


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Non-irritating skin test concentrations for ceftazidime and aztreonam in patients with a documented beta-lactam allergy.

Marie-Line M Van Der Poorten MD^{1,2*}, Athina L Van Gasse MD PhD^{1,2*}, Margo M Hagendorens MD PhD^{1,2}, Margaretha A Faber MD PhD¹, Leander De Puyseleyn MD¹, Jessy Elst MSc¹, Christel M Mertens MLT¹, Antonino Romano MD³, Didier G Ebo MD PhD¹, Vito Sabato MD PhD¹

¹ Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Department of Immunology, Allergology, Rheumatology and Infla-Med Centre of Excellence, University of Antwerp and Antwerp University Hospital, Antwerp (Belgium)

² Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Department of Paediatrics, University of Antwerp, and Antwerp University Hospital, Antwerp (Belgium)

³ IRCCS Oasi Maria S.S., Troina, Italy & Fondazione Mediterranea GB Morgagni, Catania, Italy

*both authors contributed equally to this manuscript

Correspondence:

DG. Ebo MD PhD

University of Antwerp

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

Immunology – Allergology - Rheumatology

Campus Drie Eiken T5.95

Universiteitsplein 1

2610 Antwerpen

Belgium

Tel: ++ 32 (0) 3 2652595

immuno@uantwerpen.be

ORCID ID

Van Der Poorten Marie-Line: 0000-0002-3043-3339

Van Gasse Athina: 0000-0002-3434-4333

Hagendorens Margo: 0000-0001-6361-9503

Faber Margaretha: 0000-0002-1277-5052

De Puyseleyn Leander: 0000-0001-5281-5592

Elst Jessy: 0000-0003-3506-8200

Mertens Christel: 0000-0003-2359-0771

Romano Antonino: 000-0001-9742-9898

Ebo Didier: 0000-0003-0672-7529

Sabato Vito: 0000-0002-1321-314X

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31 Clinical implication box

32 Our study shows that the maximal non-irritant concentration (NIC) for ceftazidime and for aztreonam
33 is as high as 20 mg/mL for immediate readings of intradermal skin tests (IDT). For delayed readings of
34 IDT the NIC is even a 10-fold higher, that is 200 mg/mL.

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Beta-lactam antibiotics (β -LABs) are a predominant cause of immediate and nonimmediate drug hypersensitivity reactions (henceforth designated as IDHRs and NIDHRs). At present, skin tests (STs) with immediate and delayed readings occupy the first place to document such IDHRs and NIDHRs. Therefore, optimising non-irritant concentrations (NICs) is critical to ascertain the best balance of sensitivity and specificity. Avoiding under- and over-diagnosis should not only improve antibiotic stewardship at the level of the individual patient, but also reduce the costs of our health systems.(1)

This study aims at assessing the NIC for ceftazidime, a third generation cephalosporin, and aztreonam, a synthetic monobactam, both potential safe alternative β -LABs in patients with a documented hypersensitivity reaction to penicillin G, amoxicillin (+/- clavulanic acid) or cefazolin.

For this purpose, we set up a prospective study. All patients were included by trained physicians via the outpatients' clinic of Allergology of the Antwerp University Hospital between 2018 and 2020. The local ethics committee approved this study (B300201524055) and patients provided an informed consent in accordance with the declaration of Helsinki.

All patients had with an IDHR or NIDHR to Penicillin G or amoxicillin (+/- clavulanic acid) or an IDHR to cefazolin, that was confirmed in our clinic between 2018 and 2020, were systematically offered to participate in this study. Diagnosis of their Penicillin G, amoxicillin (+/- clavulanic acid) or cefazolin hypersensitivity was based upon a history complemented by positive STs (immediate and delayed readings), drug-reactive sIgE antibodies, a sIgE-to-tIgE ratio ≥ 0.002 , or a graded drug challenge (DC).

(2)

In our hospital, it is standard practise to offer all patients with a beta-lactam allergy subsequent testing for identification of cross-reactive and safe alternative molecules. All patients that were tested, chose to participate, hence also had additional ST titrations with ceftazidime and aztreonam. Skin testing included skin prick tests (SPTs) and intradermal tests (IDTs) with immediate and delayed readings after 15 minutes and 48 hours, respectively. A 0.9% NaCl solution and histamine (10 mg/mL) were used as negative and positive control. The drugs were diluted in 0.9% NaCl not more than 2

hours before use. For SPTs, a 1 mm lancet (HAL Allergy, Leiden, Netherlands) was passed through a drop of the drug or the control solution. SPTs were considered positive when a wheal ≥ 3 mm surrounded by flare was observed. IDTs were performed only when SPTs were negative. For IDTs, 0.02 mL of the reagent solution was injected on the volar side of the forearm, using a disposable 1 mL syringe. Immediate IDT readings were considered positive when the diameter of the wheal, accompanied by an erythema, was at least 3 mm greater than the injection bleb. Delayed IDT readings were considered positive when an induration exceeding 5 mm, surrounded by an erythema, was observed (3-5). All patients with negative ST results at the recommended end concentration of 2 mg/mL (3), had additional STs with 20 mg/mL and 200 mg/mL. Graded DCs (cumulative dose of 1 gram) were performed irrespective the outcome of STs with 20 mg/mL or 200 mg/mL. The DC protocol is shown in Table E1 in article's online repository. Challenge tests were performed in our hospital, under direct supervision of a physician and nurses having immediate access to emergency medications and equipment. A DC was considered positive only when objective symptoms could be observed.

As shown in Figure 1, 31 patients with a documented IDHR or NIDHR to penicillin G, amoxicillin (+/- clavulanic acid), or cefazolin were eligible. Two patients had positive immediate ST readings for aztreonam or ceftazidime at a concentration ≤ 2 mg/mL. In these patients the ST was considered diagnostic (3), leaving 29 patients for further evaluation. Twenty-one out of these patients had a complete work-up for both aztreonam and ceftazidime, 4 patients were tested only for aztreonam and another 4 patients only for ceftazidime. Table 1 shows the patients' characteristics, ST results and DC outcomes. In 72.4% of our cases (21/29), an IDHR was diagnosed. Immediate ST readings were positive in 2, 10 and 5 patients for penicillin G, amoxicillin (+/- clavulanic acid) and cefazoline, respectively. Four patients displayed a positive sIgE result for one or more penicillin determinants. Delayed IDT readings for amoxicillin (+/- clavulanic acid) were positive in 6 patients. Two patients (# 6, 13) had negative serological and STs but experienced a non-immediate maculopapular exanthema (MPE) after a challenge with amoxicillin (+/- clavulanic acid).

As shown in Table 1, immediate readings of IDTs for ceftazidime at 20 mg/mL, – a tenfold of the NIC recommended at the start of this study (3) - were negative in all 29 patients. Four out of 26 patients demonstrated skin test responsiveness at 200 mg/mL, a one hundredfold of the recommended NIC. Immediate readings of IDTs for aztreonam at 20 mg/mL were negative in all 29 patients. In contrast, for 200 mg/mL, a positive IDT was observed in 19 out of the 26 tested patients. No delayed IDT reactions were observed. All DCs with ceftazidime and aztreonam were uneventful.

The novelty and robustness of this study relates to its inclusion criteria and prospective design including graded DCs in a large series of patients as reference test for validation of NICs. Unlike previous studies that have mainly explored NICs in (unexposed) healthy control individuals (6, 7), we studied NICs in 29 patients with a documented β -LAB hypersensitivity and therefore being at risk for potential cross-reactivity to other β -LABs. This is in line with clinical practice, where correct antibiotic stewardship in patients with a particular β -LAB hypersensitivity implies exploration of cross-reactivity and identification of safe alternatives for the future. Clinical practice does not require to dichotomize between patients and asymptomatic control individuals.

Our results show that the NICs for ceftazidime and aztreonam, as recommended in the ENDA/EAACI Drug Allergy Interest Group position paper (3) and its update by Romano et al (8), can further benefit from an assessment in patients who experienced an IDHR or NIDHR to penicillin G, amoxicillin (+/- clavulanic acid) or an IDHR to cefazolin. In such patients we endorse the recently proposed NIC of 20 mg/mL for immediate ceftazidime IDTs (8). For aztreonam, we show that the NIC for immediate IDT readings can be increased up to 20 mg/mL, without false-positives in our series.

At present, same NICs are recommended for IDHRs and NIDHRs. However, this approach is rather empirical and poorly substantiated. Exploring whether other NICs apply in NIDHRs, is an interesting area of research and could improve diagnostic performance STs. Indeed, for intradermal testing for many drugs, the NIC of the sterile intravenous preparation of drug with readings after 15 to 30 minutes might not be similar to that which evokes a T-cell response after 6 to 24 hours. (9) Our

results show that for aztreonam and ceftazidime, the NIC for delayed readings can be set at 200 mg/mL, a tenfold higher than for the immediate readings.

Admittedly, increasing the NIC entails the risk of overdiagnosis. In this respect, a limitation of this study is the small number of included subjects. However, offering a DC as reference test certainly adds rigor to our results and increases confidence in our findings.

During the interpretation of our findings, one should keep in mind that, although skin tests are extensively used, there are different methods and criteria for positivity worldwide. To establish a positive intradermal test result, the increase in wheal can be compared to the negative control, to the positive control or to the injection bleb (4). Whether our NICs apply to these other protocols, remains to be established.

Finally, we show that, although uncommon, cross-reactivity between (amino)penicillins and ceftazidime and aztreonam exists..

In conclusion, by performing drug challenges irrespective of ST outcomes with 20 mg/mL and 200 mg/mL, we provide evidence for the NIC for ceftazidime and for aztreonam to be as high as 20 mg/mL for immediate readings. For delayed readings the NIC can be increased up to 200 mg/mL. Although limited, the risk of cross-reactivity between (amino)penicillins and cefazolin and ceftazidim and aztreonam cannot be neglected.

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Table and figure legends

Table 1: patient characteristics and skin test results

Figure 1. Composition of the study population.

Table 1: patients' characteristics, skin test and challenge results

Patient	Age (y)	Sex (M/F)	Index reactions*			Skin test ceftazidime**		Skin test aztreonam**		Drug challenge	
			Culprit drug	Type of reaction	Symptoms	20 mg/mL	200 mg/mL	20 mg/mL	200 mg/mL	ceftazidime	aztreonam
1	53	F	AmC	IDHR	Anaphylaxis	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	72	M	AmC	IDHR	Anaphylaxis	-	-	-	+	-	-
3	67	F	AmC	IDHR	Anaphylaxis	-	-	-	+	-	-
4	20	F	AmC	IDHR	Undefined rash	NP	NP	-	+	-	-
5	33	M	AmC	IDHR	Undefined rash, AO	-	+	-	-	-	-
6	68	F	AmC	NIDHR	Unknown	-	-	NP	NP	-	-
7	43	M	AmC	NIDHR	MPE	-	-	-	+	-	-
8	32	F	AmC	NIDHR	Undefined rash	NP	NP	-	+	-	-
9	31	F	AmC	NIDHR	Undefined rash	-	-	-	+	-	-
10	41	M	AmC	IDHR	Urticaria	-	-	-	+	-	-
11	30	F	AmC	NIDHR	MPE	-	-	-	-	-	-
12	33	F	AmC	NIDHR	Unknown	NP	NP	-	+	-	-
13	42	F	AmC	NIDHR	Undefined rash	-	-	-	+	-	-
14	76	F	AmC	NIDHR	Undefined rash	-	-	-	+	-	-
15	41	F	AmX	IDHR	Unknown	-	-	-	+	-	-
16	25	F	AmX	IDHR	Anaphylaxis	-	-	-	+	-	-
17	56	M	AmX	IDHR	Undefined rash	-	-	NP	NP	-	-
18	54	F	AmX	IDHR	Undefined rash, AO	-	-	-	-	-	-
19	46	F	AmX	IDHR	Undefined rash	-	-	-	+	-	-
20	57	F	AmX	IDHR	Unknown	-	-	NP	NP	-	-
21	38	F	AmX	IDHR	Undefined	-	-	-	+	-	-

rash

22	37	F	AmX	IDHR	Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	-
23	62	F	CFZ	IDHR	Anaphylaxis	-	+	-	+	-	-
24	64	F	CFZ	IDHR	Anaphylaxis	-	+	-	+	-	-
25	68	F	CFZ	IDHR	Anaphylaxis	NP	NP	-	+	-	-
26	68	F	CFZ	IDHR	Undefined rash	-	-	-	-	-	-
27	47	F	CFZ	IDHR	Anaphylaxis	-	+	-	+	-	-
28	52	F	PG	IDHR	Vomiting, undefined rash	-	-	NP	NP	-	-
29	54	M	PG	IDHR	Undefined rash	-	-	-	+	-	-

+, positive; -, negative; *AmX*, amoxicillin; *AmC*, amoxicillin clavulanic acid; *CFZ*, cefazolin; *PG*, penicillin G; *AO*, angioedema; *MPE*, maculopapular exanthema; *y*, years; *M*, male; *F*, female. NP = not performed, IDHR: immediate drug hypersensitivity reaction, NIDHR: non-immediate drug hypersensitivity reaction

*Based on history complemented by positive skin test results (immediate and delayed readings), sIgE, a sIgE/tIgE ratio ≥ 0.002 , or drug challenge (patients 6 and 13)

** Results refer to immediate readings. Delayed readings resulted negative in all patients.

Table E1 : protocols IV drug challenge aztreonam and ceftazidime**Aztreonam:**

Preparation: dilute 1 g powdered drug in 50 ml NaCl 0.9 % = start concentration: 20 mg/mL

interval	Dose
0'	20 mg
15'	100 mg
30'	300 mg
45'	600 mg

Ceftazidime:

Preparation: dilute 1 g of powdered drug in 50 ml NaCl 0.9 % = start concentration: 20 mg/mL

interval	Dose
0'	20 mg
15'	100 mg
30'	300 mg
45'	600 mg

Note: a drug challenge is performed in day-hospital of the allergology department, under direct supervision of a physician. Before the drug challenge starts and after it ends, each patient is examined by an allergist. Nurses remain at bedside at all times, with a minimum nurse:patient ratio of 1:2.

A drug challenge is considered positive only when objective symptoms can be observed. If symptoms occur, an allergist is attending. Nurses prepare an appropriate dose of epinephrine and antihistamines for the patients' body weight. These emergency medications are readily available at bedside.

Emergency equipment is also available.

There is easy access to the Intensive Care Unit (< 1 minute) in case this is necessary.

Patients have to stay under observation for two hours after a negative drug challenge.

