

Letter to the Editor

Education, communication, and nickel allergy—now is the time for stricter discipline

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To the Editor,

Recently, we reported a case of primary nickel sensitization and allergic contact dermatitis on the hands following the use of a laptop computer (1). We have shown that 7 of 20 randomly selected metallic laptop computers release nickel in excessive amounts (2). It is well known that nickel may be released from mobile phones, and that, despite unambiguous EU regulatory efforts, consumers are still at risk of nickel exposure and sensitization (3–5). The last 10–20 years have seen a revolution in the mobile device market, with a shift away from stationary home-based computers to mobile laptops, and from stationary telephones to mobile phones and other ultra-portable devices, such as tablet computers. Mobile phones (or smartphones) and ultra-portables are now powerful enough to enable the user to perform a wide variety of tasks that were previously reserved for the household stationary computer, such as gaming, typing emails and other messages, listening to music, taking pictures, watching movies, reading, and navigating the streets. As a result, the average consumer spends ever-increasing amounts of time in repeated or prolonged skin contact with some form of mobile device, which may release excessive amounts of nickel and induce contact sensitization. Also, the increasing use of tablet computers and mobile devices seems inevitable, as schools and universities are now issuing tablet computers for educational

use to their students, including children in elementary school. Also, the laptop computer is now an essential worktool for schoolchildren in modern societies. Given the history of consumer nickel allergy and dermatitis resulting from the use of mobile phones and laptop computers, it is of paramount importance that manufacturers of these devices allocate more resources and priority to ensure safe, nickel-free products. A Google-based search reveals numerous websites where consumers complain of eczematous rashes following the use of laptops and tablet computers. Pertinently, when laptop computers are used, the hands tend to sweep across the surface, resulting in an accumulation of nickel ions on the skin. It is therefore possible that the current 0.5 µg nickel/cm² limit dictated by the EU Nickel Directive is too high (4). It is important that legislative efforts continue to evolve in response to the marketing of new consumer products and to changes in trends of use.

Sincerely,

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