

Letter to the Editor

Patch test results in schoolchildren

Dear Sir

I read with interest a recent paper on patch-test results in schoolchildren (1). In particular, the statistics on mercury compounds seemed worthy of further examination. Abstraction of data from Table 1 gives the following summary:

	% Positive reactions			
	boys		girls	
	6–13 years	14–15 years	6–13 years	14–15 years
thimerosal	15.1	9.8	13.6	7.3
amalgam	13.3	0.0	12.5	0.0
mercury ammonium chloride	9.1	7.5	6.5	4.1
phenylmercuric acetate	0.0	0.0	9.6	6.7

2 pieces of data stand out.

(a) Complete absence of mercury amalgam sensitization and generally lower “mercury” sensitization among 14–15-year-olds of either sex. If indeed the introduction of mercury-preserved (sic) vaccines around 1982 could account for the observed effects, this issue deserves serious attention.

(b) Complete absence of phenylmercuric acetate sensitization among boys of either age group. My own thoughts on these results are that phenylmercuric acetate is the preservative of choice for eye cosmetics, mascara, etc. Note that only eye make-up/remover products may be preserved with thimerosal (thiomersal (INN)) or phenylmercuric acetate (EU Cosmetics Directive 76/768/EEC Annex VI), and this may account for the lack of sensitization to this preservative among boys.

Yours sincerely
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Reference

1. Brasch J, Geier J. Patch-test results in schoolchildren. Results from the Information Network of Departments of Dermatology (IVDK) and the German Contact Dermatitis Research Group (DKG). *Contact Dermatitis* 1997; 37: 286–293.