

Short Communication

Rubber allergy in a shepherdess

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Case Report

A 24-year-old shepherdess presented in March 1996 with dermatitis on her face, which rapidly spread to her neck, hands and forearms. The dermatitis was so severe that she required both oral and potent topical corticosteroids. She lambs about 200 ewes each spring and March is the peak lambing time. This should give an average crop of about 300 lambs each year, with an equal spread of male and female lambs. During previous lambing seasons, she had only had minor hand dermatitis. She had no history of atopy nor of contact urticaria when birthing lambs.

Patch testing showed a +++ reaction to thiuram mix, but no reactions to wool wax alcohols, Amerchol L-101, raw lanolin, cosmetically pure lanolin or samples of lanolin-rich fleece from her sheep. Shepherds do not wear rubber gloves for delivering ewes, as it makes the lambs too slippery to handle and decreases the sensitivity for sorting out which leg belongs to which lamb in a complicated delivery. However, shepherdesses and shepherds do spend a long time around the lambing pens during the cold weeks of lambing.

One of the duties of the shepherd is to tail and castrate the lambs as soon as they are fit enough after birth. Legally, this has to be done within 7 days of birth. Lambing rings (Fig. 1) are made of fairly crude rubber and they are applied half way down the tails of the lambs and at the base of the testicles in male lambs. Shepherds may carry numerous rings in their work overall pockets and often keep their bare hands warm in these same pockets as they go around their lambing pens. Given that male lambs need 2 rings and female lambs 1, our patient might handle about 450 rubber rings per season.

Now our shepherdess wears vinyl gloves for all tailing and castrating tasks, and she had very few problems with dermatitis during the 1997 season.



Fig. 1. Rubber lambing rings.

Discussion

Rubber allergy has been reported in farm workers, particularly in dairy farmers, but this has mainly been due to allergy to IPPD in rubber milking equipment (1–3). Hand dermatitis has been described in ewe milkers allergic to lanolin (4). We have not found any previous references to dermatitis caused by allergy to rubber lambing rings.

References

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