

Short Communication

Cellist's finger dermatitis

A. H. O'HAGAN AND E. A. BINGHAM

Department of Dermatology, Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast BT12 6BA, N. Ireland, UK

Key words: contact allergy; cello; bow; frictional dermatitis; para-phenylenediamine; musicians; children. © Munksgaard, 2001.

Musicians can get many dermatoses from contact with their musical instruments (1), including allergic and frictional contact dermatitis. Allergic contact dermatitis from rosin (colophonium) (2) is not the only bow-related contact allergy.

Case Report

An 11-year-old schoolgirl gave a 3-year history of scaling on her right thumb, index and middle finger. She had a history of infantile atopic eczema. She had been playing the cello for 1 year when the rash had started, using a black-stringed bow and waxing this with rosin. The rash improved when she rested from playing and flared again restarting. She denied any history of nickel intolerance. Her mother had asthma and psoriasis.

On examination, she had redness and scaling on the palmar aspect of her right thumb, index and middle finger, with hyperkeratosis and fissuring of the interphalangeal joints. The dorsa of the fingers were clear. She also had pitting of the index and middle finger nails, without any other evidence of psoriasis.

Mycological examination was negative and the patient was patch tested to the European standard series and her rosin. She was positive to para-phenylenediamine (PPD) (D4++) only. The manufacturer of her bow string confirmed that PPD had been used to stain it.

She was treated with potent topical corticosteroids and emollients, with improvement in her condition. She still gets occasional flaring of her skin condition when she plays cello frequently, even though she is now using an undyed bow.

Discussion

Frictional contact dermatitis from the cello has been described as 'cellist's chest', 'cello knee' and even 'cello scrotum'. Allergic contact dermatitis has been reported from nickel and chromate (3) in stringed instruments, as well as allergy to PPD on chin rests (4). Bow hair is frequently dyed or impregnated with gold or platinum and this may lead to allergic contact dermatitis.

We believe that this patient had allergic contact dermatitis from PPD, though the distribution and morphology of the rash suggests that friction may also have played an important role, children being particularly at risk of this latter effect (5).

References

1. Rimmer S, Spielvogel R L. Dermatologic problems of musicians. *J Am Acad Dermatol* 1990; 22: 657-663.
2. Fisher A A. Allergic contact dermatitis from musical instruments. *Cutis* 1993; 51: 75-6.
3. Basketter D A, Briatico-Vangosa G, Kaestner W, Lally C et al. Nickel, cobalt and chromium in consumer products: a role in allergic contact dermatitis? *Contact Dermatitis* 1993; 28: 15-25.
4. Bork K. Allergic contact dermatitis on a violinist's neck from para-phenylenediamine in a chin rest stain. *Contact Dermatitis* 1993; 28: 250-251.
5. Sutton R L Jr. Summertime pityriasis of the elbow and knee. In: Sutton RL Jr (ed.): *Diseases of the skin*. 2nd edition. St Louis: CV Mosby, 1956: 898.