

Short Communication

A preliminary study of gold sensitization in Singapore

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Recent studies of sensitization to gold sodium thiosulfate seem to suggest a higher frequency of contact allergy to gold than previously thought (1–5).

Gold sodium thiosulfate (GST) 0.5% pet. has therefore been added to the patch test standard series at the National Skin Centre, Singapore, since October 1996. 345 patients were patch tested to GST over the 6-month period October 1996 to March 1997. All patients, except one, were females. Their mean age was 38 years (range: 17–63). 6.4% (22) reacted positively to GST. However, only 3 female patients (0.86%) had reactions that were clinically relevant. All 3 patients had a current history of rash from gold jewellery. 2 of the 3 patients were also allergic to nickel and the other had a positive reaction to cobalt.

Ornamental gold jewellery, such as rings and earrings (6), and gold-containing dental appliances, such as crowns (7–10), account for most cases of contact allergy to gold. Gold sodium thiosulfate 0.5% pet. has generally been regarded as the best screening test (11), though Bruze et al. (12) found that patch test reading should be done after 1–3 weeks, so as not to miss positive reactions.

With the addition of GST 0.5% pet. to our standard series, we found a high sensitization rate of 6.4% to gold, but only 3 out of 22 patients with positive reactions had clinically relevant reactions, all of which could be traced to gold jewellery. We are not yet able to comment on the possible relevance of dental gold in our patients, but plan further study of this.

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