Occupational asthma induced by the fungicide tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile

Izumi Honda, Hirotsugu Kohrogi, Masayuki Ando, Shukuro Araki, Tatsuro Ueno, Makoto Futatsuka, Atsushi Ueda

Abstract
A 48 year old male farmer had recurrent episodes of dyspnoea, shortness of breath, and wheezing after being in his plastic greenhouse when the fungicide tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile had been sprayed. A bronchial provocation test with a control challenge and a patch skin test confirmed that his asthma was induced by tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile.

(Torax 1992;47:760–761)

Tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile, a fungicide (fig 1), causes contact dermatitis and eczema. In this paper we report the case of a farmer who developed asthma after exposure to tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile.

Case report
In May 1986 a 48 year old male farmer attended Kumamoto University Hospital, with dyspnoea, shortness of breath, and wheezing. He had had his first attack of asthma, lasting five days, 10 years before. Two years previously (1984) he had had five episodes of asthma from March to June, followed by further episodes in 1985 at the same time of year and again in December. He noticed that his symptoms always occurred when he was using tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile in his plastic greenhouse or in the evening after working there. He had been using tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile for 10 years.

On admission physical examination showed nothing abnormal. His chest radiograph showed slightly overinflated lungs. Total lung capacity, vital capacity, forced vital capacity (FVC), forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV1), FEV1/FVC, and residual volume were normal. A methacholine inhalation test showed hyperresponsiveness; the threshold concentration of methacholine required for increasing respiratory resistance was 0.98 mg/ml (normal subjects usually fail to respond to the highest concentration of 25 mg/ml) and reactivity was 7.13 cm H2O/l/s/unit. Arterial blood gas tensions were normal. The blood eosinophil count and serum total IgE concentration (radioimmunosorbent test) were normal. The intradermal response to various allergens (house dust, Alternaria, Aspergillus, Penicillium, Cladosporium, lesser reed mace, ragweeds, egg plant, buckwheat) was negative; a positive response to Candida was seen after 30 minutes and lasted for more than 24 hours. A patch test with eight pesticides (diluted 200–5000 fold) used in his district (tetrachloroisophthalonitrile, chimonemethane, iprodione, thiophanate methyl, benomyl, captan, methidation, and dichlorvos) showed a positive reaction to tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile only. Specific IgE antibody to tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile was not detected by the enzyme linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA).

We measured FEV1 before and after the patient entered his plastic greenhouse, in which both tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile and dichlorvos (both at concentrations of 3–10 ppb) had been sprayed by another farmer two hours previously. Before the test his FEV1 was 2.87 l. Two minutes after entering the greenhouse he complained of dyspnoea, shortness of breath, and wheezing and his FEV1 had fallen to 1.40 l.

With the informed consent of the patient we performed tests to find out which chemical had induced asthma in the plastic greenhouse. In a double blind fashion we sprayed 0.1% tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile, 0.1% dichlorvos, or water (control) in three different rooms in the hospital on different days. We measured FEV1 before and after the exposure. Neither tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile nor dichlorvos had a detectable odour at the concentrations used. Two minutes after entering the room where tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile had been sprayed he complained of dyspnoea and came out of the room. Tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile induced an early and late asthmatic response lasting for 48 hours (fig 2). He had no symptoms in the room where dichlorvos or water had been sprayed. A normal man (aged 25 years) did not respond to tetrachloro-isophthalonitrile, dichlorvos, or water. The concentrations of tetrachloroisophthalonitrile and dichlorvos in the rooms were 1.3–9.8 ppb.

Discussion
This is the first report of tetrachloroisophthalonitrile induced asthma. The diagnosis of occupational asthma is best confirmed by showing a fall in lung function in relation to
Occupational asthma induced by the fungicide tetrachloroisophthalonitrile

exposure in the working environment to airborne dusts, gases, vapours, or fumes. In this case a provocation test showed that the asthmatic response occurred in the plastic greenhouse where tetrachloroisophthalonitrile and dichlorvos had been sprayed. The double blind provocation test showed that tetrachloroisophthalonitrile caused an early and late asthmatic response whereas dichlorvos and water (control) produced no response. The patient showed a positive reaction to tetrachloroisophthalonitrile in a patch test with eight pesticides used in his district. These results strongly suggest that tetrachloroisophthalonitrile caused asthma in this patient. We could not find any specific IgE antibody to tetrachloroisophthalonitrile using an enzyme linked immuno-
sorbent assay, but specific IgE antibody is not always found in asthma induced by chemicals.

We are grateful to Dr K Fukuda for the measurement of methacholine reactivity and to Dr K Nishigami for his valuable help in the provocation test.

2 Bach B, Pedersen NB. Contact dermatitis from a wood preservative containing tetrachloroisophthalonitrile. Contact Dermatitis 1980;4:142.

NOTICES

Pharmacology of asthma course

A course on the pharmacology of asthma will be held from 30 November to 3 December 1992 at the Royal Brompton National Heart and Lung Institute. The course is organised in two modules, on basic mechanisms (30 November, 1 December) and on therapy (2 and 3 December). It is suitable for physicians or scientists with an interest in the pharmacology and therapeutics of asthma. The link between basic mechanisms and clinical application will be emphasised. The course organiser is Professor Peter Barnes. Enquiries should be made to the Postgraduate Education Centre, National Heart and Lung Institute, London SW3 6LY (tel 071 352 8121, fax 071 376 3442).

Teaching clinical communication skills

The Cancer Research Campaign's Communication and Counselling Research Centre is running courses for senior oncologists and clinicians caring for patients with cancer. These are three day residential workshops in luxury accommodation designed to help senior clinical staff enhance their communication skills and develop expertise in teaching these to junior staff. Participants will work in small groups (four per tutor) run by experienced facilitators. The cost of the course is £250 and includes a teaching package of five purpose made videos with accompanying notes for participants' own use. These videos all relate to communication difficulties that may arise in communicating with patients with cancer. For further details please apply to: Dr Lesley Fallowfield, CRC Communication and Counselling Research Centre, London Hospital Medical College, London El 2AD (tel/fax 071-247 7903).
Occupational asthma induced by the fungicide tetrachloroisophthalonitrile.

I Honda, H Kohrogi, M Ando, S Araki, T Ueno, M Futatsuka and A Ueda

Thorax 1992 47: 760-761
doi: 10.1136/thx.47.9.760

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://thorax.bmj.com/content/47/9/760

Email alerting service

These include:
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Notes

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/