

Systemic reactions due to thiomersal

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Although thiomersal is a widely used preservative in vaccines, immunoglobulins and intracutaneous test solutions, only 1 case of systemic reaction to this

compound has been reported (1). We have seen 3 patients presenting a systemic reaction probably due to this preservative.

Case Reports

Case 1

A 66-year-old woman was admitted with acute urticaria 3 days after she had been vaccinated against influenza with a vaccine containing 0.01% thiomersal (INFLUVAC-Duphar). The rash disappeared within a few days without treatment.

Case 2

A 31-year-old doctor developed acute urticaria one day after vaccination against hepatitis B with a vaccine containing 0.05% thiomersal (H-B-VAX- Merk S.D.).

Case 3

A 16-year-old girl had a generalized exanthematic eruption. The history revealed that 2 days before she had received tetanus immunoglobulins containing 0.1% thiomersal (TETUMAN-Berna) following a trivial domestic injury.

Patch tests with ICDRG series (Hermal Trolab) were negative; a patch test with thiomersal 0.1% pet. was positive in all 3 patients after 48 and 72 h.

Discussion

These 3 patients presented a systemic cutaneous reaction after injection of parenteral solutions containing

thiomersal as preservative. Since the patch tests revealed sensitization, we believe that thiomersal was the cause. Systemic reactions to thiomersal may not be rare. Some systemic reactions may have been misdiagnosed as being due to the pharmaceutical principles of the drugs. The presence of thiomersal in a large number of a widely used solutions means that exposure to it is extremely common, and sensitization could be frequent (2-4).

It is useful to patch test with thiomersal in all patients with systemic reactions following the use of solutions containing merthiolate.

References

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