

Current Awareness in Clinical Toxicology

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March 2011

CURRENT AWARENESS PAPERS OF THE MONTH

Do corticosteroids have a role in preventing or reducing acute toxic lung injury caused by inhalation of chemical agents?

de Lange DW, Meulenbelt J. Clin Toxicol 2011; 49: 61-71.

Objective

To assess the evidence that treatment with corticosteroids improves the outcome in those exposed to lung-damaging agents.

Methods

We searched Pubmed, Toxnet, Cochrane database, Google Scholar, and Embase from 1966 to January 2010 using the search terms "steroid", "corticosteroid", "lung injury", "lung damage", and "inhalation". These searches identified 287 papers of which 118 contained information on animal studies. However, most were reviews or case reports and only a few were controlled animal experiments of which 13 were considered relevant.

Role of corticosteroids: animal studies

Corticosteroids have no beneficial effect at the alveolar level on acute lung injury, which is caused by inhalation of poorly water-soluble compounds (e.g. nitrogen dioxide, ozone, phosgene) or following severe exposure to water-soluble compounds (e.g. chlorine, ammonia). In the recovery phase, corticosteroids may even be harmful, because corticosteroids hamper the division of type II alveolar cells and hamper the differentiation from type II into type I alveolar cells. The latter is important for the re-epithelialization of the alveolus and removal of excess of water in the alveolus. Furthermore, the quality of animal studies does not always allow extrapolation to human exposures. Differences between humans and animals in anatomy, pulmonary defense systems, breathing physiology, as well as the way the animals have been exposed, and the timing and route of corticosteroids in animal studies make predictions difficult.

Role of corticosteroids: human studies

An abundance of uncontrolled case reports and a few human crossover studies have evaluated the outcome of human volunteers exposed to various lung-damaging agents. Only a few reports contained systematic information on corticosteroid treatment. Data on the efficacy of corticosteroids after human exposure to lung-damaging agents are inconclusive. Often the number of patients involved is small or the severity of exposure is unclear or not well determined. These

***Current Awareness in Clinical Toxicology is produced monthly for the EAPCCT
by the Birmingham Unit of the UK National Poisons Information Service.
The NPIS is commissioned by the Health Protection Agency.***



reports are therefore limited in their ability to establish a cause-effect relationship for the treatments involved. In some studies involving mild to moderate exposure to water-soluble agents (e.g. chlorine, ammonia), corticosteroid treatment was beneficial for some physiological parameters, such as airway resistance or arterial oxygen tension. However, severe lung injury and inflammation appear not to be improved by corticosteroid treatment. The optimal duration of treatment to obtain these beneficial effects has not been assessed adequately, but it only seems to be useful in the first hours after exposure. Generally, studies evaluating exposure to water-soluble compounds have too short a follow-up, which hampers the evaluation of the efficacy of corticosteroid treatment. The results of studies with longer follow-up suggest that the initial slight improvement in some variables is lost several hours after exposure.

Conclusions

Clinical data on the efficacy of corticosteroids after human exposure to lung-damaging agents are inconclusive as the number of well-structured controlled studies is small and the indications for administration of corticosteroids are unclear. There have been no human controlled studies of high-dose exposure to lung-damaging agents. Furthermore, treatment with corticosteroids is limited by the potential side effects, such as prolonged neuromuscular weakness, deregulation of glucose metabolism, superinfection, and sepsis, which could diminish the chances for recovery.

Clinical course of repeated supratherapeutic ingestion of acetaminophen

Alhelail MA, Hoppe JA, Rhyee SH, Heard KJ. Clin Toxicol 2011; 49: 108-12.

Background

Repeated supratherapeutic ingestion (RSTI) of acetaminophen (APAP) is recognized as an important cause of APAP-related morbidity and mortality. This study describes the characteristics and clinical course of patients with RSTI, and identifies the risk factors for developing hepatotoxicity and death.

Methods

This secondary analysis of a multicenter retrospective chart review studied patients treated with IV and/or oral N-acetylcysteine for acetaminophen poisoning. For this analysis, we included all subjects coded as RSTIs, defined as ingestions of greater than 4 g of APAP per 24 h over a period longer than 8 h. Data collected include demographics, coingestants, comorbidities, presenting laboratory data, and outcomes. The analysis includes descriptive statistics and associations of demographic and clinical factors with patient outcome.

Results

Of the 503 patients enrolled, 119 (23.7%) were RSTI. The mean age was 39.6 years (SD \pm 15); 63.9% of the patients were females, 60.5% Caucasians, 27.7% alcoholics, 5% malnourished, 10.9% had viral hepatitis, and 3.4% had other liver diseases. Coingestants included ethanol, opioids, and antihistamines (17.6, 48.7, and 19.3%, respectively). Among this group, 44 patients developed hepatotoxicity, two received liver transplants, and four died (37.0, 1.7, and 3.4%, respectively). The risk for hepatotoxicity increased with a history of alcoholism, viral hepatitis, and other liver diseases. A history of alcoholism and an elevated presenting serum creatinine were associated with increased risk for death/transplant. The lowest presenting ALT levels in a subject who developed hepatotoxicity and who died were 252 and 426 IU/l, respectively.

Conclusion

RSTI-induced hepatotoxicity and poor outcomes can be predicted at the patient's presentation. All patients with RSTI who developed hepatotoxicity presented with an abnormal ALT. A history of alcoholism and an elevated creatinine at presentation are markers of increased risk for hepatotoxicity and death.

Asymptomatic alanine aminotransferase elevations with therapeutic doses of acetaminophen

Heard K. Clin Toxicol 2011; 49: 90-3.

While acetaminophen overdose has been recognized as a cause of alanine aminotransferase (ALT) elevations for over 40 years, recent studies have reported asymptomatic ALT elevations in research subjects who are administered with therapeutic doses (4 g/d or less) of acetaminophen for more than 4 days. While the clinical course of these elevations is not completely defined, available evidence suggests that even in high risk groups the elevations are not accompanied by evidence of hepatic dysfunction and that resolve if treatment is continued. Toxicologists should consider therapeutic acetaminophen use as a cause of ALT elevation. Further study of the mechanism of ALT elevations may provide new insight into other causes of drug-induced liver injury and hepatic adaptation.

Benzodiazepines and antipsychotic medications for prevention of lethality from acute cocaine toxicity in animal models — a systematic review and meta-analysis

Heard K, Cleveland NR, Krier S. Hum Exp Toxicol 2011; online early: doi: 10.1177/0960327111401435:

There are no controlled human studies to determine the efficacy of benzodiazepines or antipsychotic medications for prevention or treatment of acute cocaine toxicity. The only available controlled data are from animal models and these studies have reported inconsistent benefits. The objective of this study was to quantify the reported efficacy of benzodiazepines and antipsychotic medication for the prevention of mortality due to cocaine poisoning. We conducted a systematic review to identify English language articles describing experiments that compared a benzodiazepine or antipsychotic medication to placebo for the prevention of acute cocaine toxicity in an animal model. We then used these articles in a meta-analysis with a random-effects model to quantify the absolute risk reduction observed in these experiments. We found 10 articles evaluating antipsychotic medications and 15 articles evaluating benzodiazepines. Antipsychotic medications reduced the risk of death by 27% (95% CI, 15.2%–38.7%) compared to placebo and benzodiazepines reduced the risk of death by 52% (42.8%–60.7%) compared to placebo. Both treatments showed evidence of a dose-response effect, and no experiment found a statistically significant increase in risk of death. We conclude that both benzodiazepines and antipsychotic medications are effective for the prevention of lethality from cocaine toxicity in animal models.

Methaemoglobinaemia associated with the use of cocaine and volatile nitrites as recreational drugs: a review

Hunter L, Gordge LJ, Dargan PI, Wood DM. Br J Clin Pharmacol 2011; online early: doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2125.2011.03950.x:

Methaemoglobinaemia can cause significant tissue hypoxia, leading to severe, potentially life threatening clinical features and/or death. Over recent years there have been increasing reports of methaemoglobinaemia related to recreational drug use. There have been 25 articles describing methaemoglobinaemia related to recreational use of volatile nitrites (poppers) and more recently, 4 reports of methaemoglobinaemia in association with recreational cocaine use. In this article we discuss the mechanisms by which methaemoglobinaemia occurs in relation to the use of both volatile nitrites and cocaine, and summarise the published cases of recreational drug-related methaemoglobinaemia. The volatile nitrites can cause methaemoglobinaemia directly through their activity as oxidising agents. However, with cocaine, methaemoglobinaemia is related to adulterants such as local anaesthetics or phenacetin, rather than to the cocaine itself. Clinicians managing patients with acute recreational drug toxicity should be aware of the potential for methaemoglobinaemia in these patients, particularly in patients with cyanosis or unexplained low

oxygen saturations on pulse oximetry, and ensure that appropriate and timely management is provided, including where appropriate the use of methylthionium chloride (methylene blue).

Pharmacobezoars described and demystified

Simpson S-E. Clin Toxicol 2011; 49: 72-89.

Introduction

A bezoar is a concretion of foreign material that forms and persists in the gastrointestinal tract. Bezoars are classified by their material origins. Phytobezoars contain plant material, trichobezoars contain hair, lactobezoars contain milk proteins, and pharmacobezoars contain pharmaceutical products. Tablets, suspensions, and even insoluble drug delivery vehicles can, on rare occasions, and sometimes under specific circumstances, form pharmacobezoars. The goal of this review is to catalog and examine all of the available reports in the English language medical literature that convincingly describe the formation and management of pharmacobezoars.

Methods

Articles included in this review were identified by performing searches using the terms "bezoar," "pharmacobezoar," and "concretion" in the following databases: OVID MEDLINE, PubMed, and JSTOR. The complete MEDLINE and JSTOR holdings were included in the search without date ranges. The results were limited to English language publications. Articles that described nonmedication bezoars were not included in the review. Articles describing phytobezoars, food bezoars, fecal impactions, illicit drug packet ingestions, enteral feeding material bezoars, and hygroscopic diet aid bezoars were excluded. The bibliographic references within the articles already accumulated were then examined in order to gather additional pharmacobezoar cases. The cases are grouped by pharmaceutical agent that formed the bezoar, and groupings are arranged in alphabetical order. Discussions and conclusions specific to each pharmaceutical agent are included in that agent's subheading.

Discussion

Patterns and themes that emerged in the review of the assembled case reports are reviewed and presented in a more concise format.

Conclusion

Pharmacobezoars form under a wide variety of circumstances and in a wide variety of patients. They are difficult to diagnose reliably. Rules for suspecting, diagnosing, and properly managing a pharmacobezoar are highly dependent on the pharmaceutical agent or agents involved. Becoming familiar with the sparse data available on pharmacobezoars and maintaining a high index of suspicion in future clinical encounters may be the best way to improve diagnostic sensitivity and accuracy.

Hyperglycemia is a strong prognostic factor of lethality in methanol poisoning

Sanaei-Zadeh H, Kazemi Esfeh S, Zamani N, Jamshidi F, Shadnia S. J Med Toxicol 2011; online early: doi: 10.1007/s13181-011-0142-x:

Methanol poisoning is seen in the form of isolated episodes, or intentional ingestion and epidemics. Despite its efficient treatment, methanol poisoning has high morbidity and mortality rates. So far, several studies have been performed to identify the prognostic factors in methanol poisoning. Recently, during the treatment of patients with methanol poisoning, we observed that patients' blood glucose levels were high on presentation to the hospital, particularly in those who expired. Through a literature search, we found that no studies have been performed on blood glucose levels or hyperglycemia in methanol poisoning. Therefore, the present retrospective study was done as a preliminary investigation to understand whether there was a meaningful relationship between methanol poisoning and blood glucose level on presentation, and also if hyperglycemia could be considered as a prognostic factor for mortality.

In this retrospective study, a review of the hospital charts was performed for all patients who were treated for methanol poisoning from March 2003 to March 2010 in two hospitals in Tehran, Iran. Those with definitive diagnosis of methanol poisoning, no history of diabetes mellitus, and normal or low body mass index (<25) were included. Patients' demographic information, clinical manifestations, time elapsed between ingestion and presentation, blood glucose level on presentation (before treatment), results of arterial blood gas analysis, and the clinical outcome were recorded. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS software (version 17, Chicago, Illinois, USA) and application of Mann-Whitney U test, Pearson's chi-square test, Pearson correlation coefficient (r), receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve, and logistic regression. P values less than 0.05 were considered as the statistically significant levels.

Ninety-five patients with methanol poisoning met the inclusion criteria and were included in the study. Of these, 91 (96%) were male and 4 (4%) were female. Mean age was 31.61 ± 14.3 years (range, 13 to 75). Among the 95 patients, 68 survived (72%) and 27 expired (28%). Median blood glucose level was 144 mg/dL (range, 75 to 500). There was no significant statistical correlation between blood glucose level and time of treatment, age, pCO_2 , or serum bicarbonate concentration, but blood glucose level had a statistically significant correlation with pH ($r = -0.242$, $P = 0.02$) and base deficit ($r = 0.230$, $P = 0.03$). The mean blood glucose level was 140 ± 55 and 219 ± 99 mg/dL in the survivor and non-survivor patients, respectively ($P < 0.001$). Considering the cutoff level of 140 mg/dL for blood glucose and using logistic regression analysis, and adjusting according to the admission data with significant statistical difference in the two study groups, the odds ratio for hyperglycemia as a risk factor for death was 6.5 (95% confidence interval = 1.59-26.4).

Our study showed that blood glucose levels were high in methanol poisoning and even higher in those who died in comparison with the survivors. Therefore, hyperglycemia might be a new prognostic factor in methanol poisoning, but further studies are needed to determine whether controlling hyperglycemia has therapeutic consequences.

Outcomes of visual disturbances after methanol poisoning

Sanaei-Zadeh H, Zamani N, Shadnia S. Clin Toxicol 2011; 49: 102-7.

Introduction

Methanol poisoning and toxic optic neuropathy is still seen worldwide. Little attention has been paid to the persistent visual disturbances following methanol poisoning. We aimed to evaluate the outcomes of visual disturbances in methanol-poisoned patients referred to us with visual disturbances.

Methods

This retrospective observational case series evaluated the outcomes of visual disturbances in patients with methanol poisoning hospitalized in Loghman Hakim and Hazrat Rasoul Akram hospitals between March 2003 and October 2009. Medical charts were evaluated for age, gender, time between consumption and hospital presentation, gastrointestinal symptoms, abnormal neurological findings at presentation and during hospital admission, arterial blood gas results, treatment modalities, history of chronic diseases, and status of vision at presentation and discharge from the hospital. The patients or their relatives were contacted 1 year after the admission date of the last patient and questioned about the status of the patients' vision at the time of hospital discharge, after discharge, and at the time of phone contacts.

Results

A total of 50 patients with methanol poisoning and visual disturbances at presentation survived. Thirty-seven cases were followed; 16 showed visual disturbance improvement before hospital discharge, and 21 had visual disturbance after discharge. Visual disturbances were classified into two groups: severe to total blindness and blurred/snowfield vision. Patients were also grouped into one of four categories: group I: patients whose blurred or snowfield vision completely recovered within up to a maximum of 2 weeks after discharge ($n = 7$); group II, the patients who were blind

at the time of discharge (n = 5) and partially recovered within a maximum of 3-4 weeks; group III, the patients who were blind at the time of discharge and gained no improvement in their vision (n = 5); group IV, who were blind at the time of discharge, partially recovered within few days to approximately 1 month and experienced reduced vision and blindness after about a maximum of 9 months (n = 4). Patients whose visual disturbances improved with treatment and the patients in group I were considered as transient (n = 23) and groups II, III, and IV as permanent visual disturbance cases (n = 14). Significant difference was not seen in age, sex, elapsed time to presentation, gastrointestinal symptoms, abnormal neurological and CT findings, and arterial blood gas results at presentation between the transient and permanent visual disturbance groups. No association existed between the visual disturbance and abnormal neurological and CT findings.

Conclusion

Blurred or snowfield vision in methanol poisoning resolved. However, outcomes of the blindness cannot be predicted. In some patients, blindness improves but these patients eventually experience reduced vision afterwards.

Effects of occupational exposure to arsenic on the nervous system: clinical and neurophysiological studies

Sińczuk-Walczak H, Szymczak M, Hałatek T. Int J Occup Environ Health 2010; 23: 347-55.

Objectives

A number of metals, especially heavy metals, exhibit neurotoxic properties. Neurological and neurophysiological studies indicate that the functions of the central (CNS) and peripheral nervous system (PNS) may be impaired under conditions of exposure to arsenic (As). The aim of the present study was to assess the effects of inorganic arsenic on the central and peripheral nervous system.

Materials and Methods

The study covered a group of 21 male workers (mean age: 41.9 yr; SD: 7.6; range: 31-55 yr) employed in a copper smelting factory. Their employment duration ranged from 5 to 33 years (mean: 18.1 yr; SD: 7.8). Arsenic concentrations in workplace air amounted to 0.01003 mg/m³ on average (SD: 0.00866). Urine arsenic concentrations ranged from 3.48 to 23.63 µg/l (mean: 11.91 µg/l; SD: 9.5). The control group consisted of 16 males non-occupationally exposed to As, matched for gender, age and work shift pattern. The evaluation of neurological effects was based on the findings of neurological examination, electroencephalography (EEG), visual evoked potentials (VEPs) and electroneurography (ENeG).

Results

Clinical symptoms, such as sleeplessness or sleepiness, irritability, headache, painful spasms in extremity muscles, extremity paresthesia and pain, and muscular fatigue prevailed among functional disorders of the nervous system in workers chronically exposed to As. Neurological examination did not reveal any organic lesions in the CNS or PNS. In EEG records classified as abnormal, generalized changes were most common. VEP examinations revealed abnormalities in evoked response latency. Stimulation of the motor fibers of the peroneal and medial nerves resulted in a decreased amplitude of the motor potential. Stimulation of the sensory fibers of medial nerves brought about a decreased amplitude of the sensory potential and a lower conduction velocity of the sural nerves.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that exposure to As concentrations within the threshold limit values (TLV) can induce subclinical effects on the nervous system, especially subclinical neuropathy.

Alcohol-related peripheral neuropathy: nutritional, toxic, or both?

Mellion M, Gilchrist JM, De La Monte S. Muscle Nerve 2011; 43: 309-16.

Alcohol-related peripheral neuropathy (ALN) is a potentially debilitating complication of alcoholism that results in sensory, motor, and autonomic dysfunction. Unfortunately, ALN is rarely discussed as a specific disease entity in textbooks because it is widely assumed to primarily reflect consequences of nutritional deficiency. This hypothesis is largely based on observations first made over eight decades ago when it was demonstrated that thiamine deficiency (beriberi) neuropathy was clinically similar to ALN. In recent studies, failure of thiamine treatment to reverse ALN, together with new information demonstrating clinical and electrophysiological distinctions between ALN and nutritional deficiency neuropathies, suggests that alcohol itself may significantly predispose and enhance development of neuropathy in the appropriate clinical setting. We reviewed the evidence on both sides and conclude that ALN should be regarded as a toxic rather than nutritional neuropathy.

Blood lead at currently acceptable levels may cause preterm labour

Vigeh M, Yokoyama K, Seyedaghamiri Z, Shinohara A, Matsukawa T, Chiba M, Yunesian M. Occup Environ Med 2011; 68: 231-4.

Objectives

Although occupational and environmental exposures to lead have been dramatically reduced in recent decades, adverse pregnancy outcomes have been observed at "acceptable" levels of blood lead concentrations ($\leq 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$).

Methodology

Blood samples were collected from 348 singleton pregnant women, aged 16–35 years, during the first trimester of pregnancy (8–12 weeks) for lead measurement by inductively coupled plasma–mass spectrometry. Subjects were followed up and divided into two groups (preterm and full-term deliveries) according to duration of gestation.

Results

The average (range) and geometric means of blood lead levels were 3.8 (1.0–20.5) and 3.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$, respectively. Blood lead level was significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher in mothers who delivered preterm babies than in those who delivered full-term babies (mean \pm SD: 4.46 \pm 1.86 and 3.43 \pm 1.22 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$, respectively). Logistic regression analysis demonstrated that a 1 unit increase in blood lead levels led to an increased risk of preterm birth (OR 1.41, 95% CI 1.08 to 1.84).

Conclusion

Adverse pregnancy outcomes may occur at blood lead concentrations below the current acceptable level.

'Dippers' flu' and its relationship to PON1 polymorphisms

Cherry N, Mackness M, Mackness B, Dippnall M, Povey A. Occup Environ Med 2011; 68: 211-7.

Objectives

Sheep-dippers report an acute flu-like condition (dippers' flu: DF) but the cause and relation to chronic disability are unknown.

Methods

In a case-referent study previously reported, 175 sheep dippers with chronic disability and 234 referents, sheep dippers in good health, completed an interview with information on dipping, type of pesticide used and health for each year 1970–2000 and gave blood for typing of PON1 polymorphisms.

Results

Reports of DF were much higher (66.3% 116/175) in the chronically unwell than in those without chronic ill-health (18.0% 42/234: OR=8.99 95% CI 5.69–14.21). No significant relation was seen

between reported exposures and DF in those with chronic illness, but risk was higher with concentrate handling in those without. An R allele at position 192 on PON1 related to reports of DF both in those with chronic illness (OR=2.04 95% CI 1.08–3.87) and in those who started dipping after 1969 and were not chronically unwell (OR=2.52 95%CI 1.00–6.37). Interaction between handling diazinon concentrate and PON1 (192R) increased the risk of DF. No precipitating factor was identified in a case-crossover analysis. In the group without chronic illness those with 192R developed DF earlier (risk ratio 2.49 95%CI 1.03–6.02).

Conclusion

'Dippers' flu' and chronic ill-health attributed to dipping share a common polymorphism (192R). The interaction between handling diazinon concentrate and PON1 genotype supports the conclusion that organophosphates may cause DF. Sheep dippers who are still healthy but experience 'dippers' flu' may be wise to further limit exposures to organophosphates.

Pulmonary function and oxidative stress in workers exposed to styrene in plastic factory

Sati PC, Khaliq F, Vaney N, Ahmed T, Tripathi AK, Banerjee BD. Hum Exp Toxicol 2011; online early: doi: 10.1177/0960327111401436:

Styrene is a volatile organic compound used in factories for synthesis of plastic products. The pneumotoxicity of styrene in experimental animals is known. The aim of the present study was to study the effect of styrene on lung function and oxidative stress in occupationally exposed workers in plastic factory.

Thirty-four male workers, between 18 and 40 years of age, exposed to styrene for atleast 8 hours a day for more than a year were studied, while 30 age- and sex-matched healthy subjects not exposed to styrene served as controls.

Assessment of lung functions showed a statistically significant reduction ($p < 0.05$) in most of the lung volumes, capacities (FVC, FEV1, VC, ERV, IRV, and IC) and flow rates (PEFR, MEF_{75%}, and MVV) in the study group (workers) as compared to controls. Malondialdehyde (MDA) was observed to be significantly high ($p < 0.05$) while ferric-reducing ability of plasma (FRAP) was significantly low ($p < 0.05$) in styrene-exposed subjects. Reduced glutathione (GSH) level was significantly depleted in exposed subjects as compared to control group. The mean value of serum cytochrome c in styrene-exposed subjects was found to be 1.1 ng/ml (0.89–1.89) while in control its levels were under detection limit (0.05 ng/ml).

It shows that styrene inhalation by workers leads to increased level of oxidative stress, which is supposed to be the cause of lung damage.

Sulfur mustard toxicity: history, chemistry, pharmacokinetics, and pharmacodynamics

Ghabili K, Agutter PS, Ghanei M, Ansarin K, Panahi Y, Shoja MM. Crit Rev Toxicol 2011; online early: doi: 10.3109/10408444.2010.541224:

Sulfur mustard (SM) and similar bifunctional agents have been used as chemical weapons for almost 100 years. Victims of high-dose exposure, both combatants and civilians, may die within hours or weeks, but low-dose exposure causes both acute injury to the eyes, skin, respiratory tract and other parts of the body, and chronic sequelae in these organs are often debilitating and have a serious impact on quality of life. Ever since they were first used in warfare in 1917, SM and other mustard agents have been the subjects of intensive research, and their chemistry, pharmacokinetics and mechanisms of toxic action are now fairly well understood. In the present article we review this knowledge and relate the molecular-biological basis of SM toxicity, as far as it has been elucidated, to the pathological effects on exposure victims.

Effect of mustard gas exposure on incidence of lung cancer: a longitudinal study

Doi M, Hattori N, Yokoyama A, Onari Y, Kanehara M, Masuda K, Tonda T, Ohtaki M, Kohno N. Am J Epidemiol 2011; online early: doi: [10.1093/aje/kwq426](https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwq426):

Sulfur mustard, an agent used in chemical warfare, is an alkylating substance with carcinogenic potential. However, the precise long-term carcinogenic effects of mustard gas are unclear. Since 1952, the authors have conducted health surveys of former workers who were employed from 1929 to 1945 in a poisonous gas factory in Okuno-jima, Hiroshima, Japan.

This prospective study was undertaken from 1952 to 2005 to examine the incidence of lung cancer among the workers who were exposed to mustard gas ($n= 480$), lewisite ($n= 55$), and/or diphenylcyanarsine ($n = 178$), as well as the incidence among unexposed workers ($n = 969$). The stochastic relation between exposure and lung cancer was explored on the basis of multistage carcinogenesis by using an accelerated hazard model with a transformed age scale.

Mustard gas exposure was found to transform the age scale for developing lung cancer. One year of exposure in subjects ≤ 18 or >18 years old at first exposure shifted the age scale down by 4.9 years and 3.3 years, respectively. On the basis of the long-term follow-up of former workers in the poisonous gas factory, the authors concluded that sulfur mustard decreased the age at which people were at risk of developing lung cancer and that the effect declined with aging.

TOXICOLOGY

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