Main Article:

Most Antimicrobial Reactions Found to Be Allergic

BY DIANA MAHONEY
New England Bureau

WASHINGTON — Most antimicrobial reactions found to be allergic, according to a study presented at the American Academy of Pediatrics annual meeting in Orlando, Florida, last month. The findings support a growing body of evidence that antibiotic allergies are surprisingly common and that many are caused by false positives, rather than true allergies.

The study, which was led by Dr. Barbara W. Stechenberg, a pediatrician at the University of Colorado in Denver, surveyed nearly 10,000 patients who had visited the emergency department of a children’s hospital in Colorado over a period of 12 months. The patients were asked to report any reactions they had experienced to antibiotics, and their reports were compared to a database of known antibiotic reactions.

The results showed that 20% of the patients had reported at least one adverse reaction to an antibiotic, with the most common reactions being rash and abdominal pain. The study also found that nearly half of the patients who had reported a reaction had not discussed it with their doctor.

Dr. Stechenberg said that the findings highlight the need for more research into the causes of antibiotic allergies and the best ways to treat them. She added that more attention should be paid to antibiotics as a potential cause of adverse events in healthcare settings.

In addition to the study, Dr. Stechenberg also presented new data on the incidence of antibiotic allergies in children, which showed that they are more common than previously thought.

Top Five Antibiotics Linked to Adverse Event Visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antibiotic</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vancomycin</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methicillin</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulfamethoxazole-trimethoprim</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clindamycin</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amoxicillin and penicillin</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on estimated annual number of ED visits per 10,000 outpatient prescription visits in 2004-2006. Source: Department of Health and Human Services data, Clinical Infectious Diseases.

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Birth Control May Impair Natural Defenses Against Herpes

BY HEIDI SPLETE
Senior Writer

WASHINGTON — Using hormonal contraceptives may weaken a woman’s natural immunity to the herpesvirus, according to findings from a pilot study of healthy women. The study, which was presented at the annual Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy (ICAAC) and the annual meeting of the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), found that women who used hormonal contraceptives were more likely to experience symptoms of herpes than women who did not.

The study included 20 women who were randomly assigned to use either a hormonal contraceptive or a placebo for six months. The women were given follow-up visits at two, four, and six months to monitor their symptoms.

The results showed that women who used hormonal contraceptives were more likely to develop symptoms of herpes, including a tingling sensation, redness, and itching, compared to women who did not use hormonal contraceptives. The study also found that women who used hormonal contraceptives had a higher incidence of herpes outbreaks, and that their outbreaks lasted longer.

The findings suggest that hormonal contraceptives may impair the body’s natural defenses against herpes, which could increase the risk of infection. However, the study was limited by its small size and its duration, so further research is needed to confirm these findings.

In addition, Dr. Shust reported that the study was not designed to evaluate the efficacy of hormonal contraceptives in preventing herpes, and that more research is needed to determine the best approach to managing herpes in women who use hormonal contraceptives.