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An audit to assess the frequency and severity of accidental allergic reactions in cow's milk allergic children

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Background: Milk is the 2nd most common allergen after Peanuts and the annual frequency of accidental allergic reactions in recent studies from Spain and USA has been shown to be 34-40%. The AAR severity is dependent on food allergens and history of atopic diseases such as asthma, eczema, hay-fever and recurrent wheeze.

Objectives: To evaluate the frequency of accidental allergic reactions in the UK in a two-month audit thus observe variation depending on geographical distribution, determine the risk factors that would affect the severity of clinical characteristics and circumstance where the reactions occurred.

Methods: A structured interview using a standardized questionnaire on 62 patients (35 male and 27 female; median age 67 months). The questions entailed; the number of accidental reactions and where they occurred, the severity of the reactions, other food allergies and risk factors such as asthma, hay-fever, recurrent wheeze and eczema. The symptoms were classified as mild, moderate and severe. The previous and current skin prick test was also recorded.

Results: The annual AAR frequency was 57%. 37 (60%) children had 51 accidental reactions in the past year (43% mild, 19% moderate and 38% severe). 60% of the reactions took place at home and Piriton was the major mode of treatment (79%). Three reactions were anaphylactic and the children were rushed to hospital where epinephrine was administered (Epipen injections). Oral was the main type of exposure (89%) and products containing milk were the main types of food (51%). 48% of patients who had a wheal size above the median had moderate to severe symptoms.

Conclusions: Accidental allergic reactions are frequent in children and this was brought about by, contamination, mislabelling, change of recipes by companies, misreading by caregivers and direct milk intake. The risk factors for AAR severity were hay-fever, Peanut allergy, having more than one atopic disease and the current wheal size (p-value <0.05).

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