

Short Communication

Rapid systemic valaciclovir reaction subsequent to aciclovir contact allergy

K. LAMMINTAUSTA, L. MÄKELÄ AND K. KALIMO

Department of Dermatology, Turku University Central Hospital, SF-20520 Turku, Finland

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Case Report

A 44-year-old woman used aciclovir cream for 2 weeks on her 1st attack of genital herpes without any improvement. Oral valaciclovir (500 mg 2× daily) was started. After the 1st 2 tablets, an itchy, symmetrical exanthem appeared on the face, trunk and extremities. Valaciclovir was stopped, she received oral antihistamines and the eruption healed in 2 weeks. 1 month later, the patient developed a labial herpes infection. She used aciclovir cream and vesicobullous lesions with erythema appeared in the labial and perioral skin, with an exanthem on the upper trunk and extremities.

2 months later, patch tests were carried out with the standard series, aciclovir, valaciclovir, ganciclovir and famciclovir (Table 1). The patient reacted to cetearyl alcohol in the standard series, concentrations down to 1% of aciclovir and valaciclovir, and 20% ganciclovir. There was no reaction to famciclovir. Oral challenge was carried out with famciclovir. Itchy erythematous patches

appeared on the upper lip and upper trunk after 325 mg famciclovir given in 3 doses over 2 days.

Discussion

Valaciclovir is the L-valine ester of aciclovir and is almost completely converted to aciclovir after oral administration, increasing oral bioavailability 3 to 5× (1, 2). In our patient, contact sensitization had initially developed from using topical aciclovir (3–6). Its prodrug valaciclovir subsequently elicited rapid-onset systemic contact dermatitis. We had hoped that the patch-test-negative famciclovir might be an alternative choice of treatment for this patient, as previously suggested (7). Oral provocation with minor doses, however, soon elicited the same skin reaction.

Our patient had simultaneous contact allergy to cetearyl alcohol, present in aciclovir cream. Simultaneous sensitization to propylene glycol in topical acyclovir has previously been reported (4, 7).

References

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Table 1. Positive patch tests

Allergen	Concentration (%)	Patch test		Prick test aq.
		pet.	aq.	
cetearyl alcohol	20	++		
	10	++		
	5	+		
aciclovir	as is	+	+	–
	20	+	+	–
	10	+	+	–
	1	–	+	NT
valaciclovir	as is	++	++	–
	20	++	++	–
	10	++	++	–
	1	+	+	NT
ganciclovir	as is	+	+	–
	20	–	+	–
famciclovir	as is	–	–	–
	20	–	–	–