

ABSENCE OF DERMATITIS AMONG RUBBER PLANTATION WORKERS

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None of the 40 rubber plantation workers exposed to latex for many years examined by us, had developed any significant dermatitis apart from thickening and lichenification of the dorsal aspect of right index finger and medial aspect of right thumb.

Key words : Latex, *Hevea brasiliensis*, Occupational dermatitis.

Hevea brasiliensis is the most important source of natural rubber. The latex is collected by slicing the bark of the tree, and numerous chemicals are added to impart some special properties.¹ We surveyed 40 workers to assess the incidence of dermatitis among the rubber plantation workers who are exposed to latex, sodium sulfit, ammonia and formaline but not to antioxidants and accelerators which are used in the rubber industries.

Materials and Methods

Forty rubber plantation workers were observed during tapping, collection of latex into buckets after tapping, and during addition of anticoagulants such as sodium bisulfite and formaline. The mode of handling the coagulated latex, and the means adopted to press it into sheets, followed by drying and smoking in smoke houses were carefully observed. During each of these steps, the workers were in intimate physical contact with the latex. During collection, the workers were seen to use their right index finger and medial aspect of the right

thumb to empty the coconut shells in which latex was collected by tapping. Both hands were often smeared with latex for long periods. In addition, the feet, forearms and face also got spattered with latex during its collection.

Results

Except for thickening and lichenification of the dorsal aspect of the right index finger and medial aspect of the right thumb, none of the workers showed any evidence of dermatitis.

Comments

Latex is composed mainly of carbohydrates and inorganic salts such as potassium, magnesium, copper, iron, sodium, calcium and phosphate.² It is tapped from the latex vessels in the bark of *Hevea brasiliensis*.² Rubber latex sensitizes¹ rarely and this was reaffirmed by our study. Patch testing with the other agents was not undertaken.

References

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