

EPIDEMIC OF LEAD POISONING CAUSED BY ADULTERATED MARIJUANA

Bergmann I (1), Busse F (2), Stumvoll M (2), Hentschel H (2). 1. *Poison Information Centre, Erfurt, Germany*; 2. *Department of Internal Medicine, University Hospital Leipzig, Germany*

Objective: Unexpectedly, many young people fell ill with occasionally severe symptoms of lead poisoning in the area around the city of Leipzig (Saxony, Germany) in summer and autumn 2007. None of these persons was occupationally exposed to lead. The source of lead uptake had to be elucidated. Decisions for further diagnostic and therapeutic measures were to be decided. **Case series:** Marijuana adulterated with metallic lead could be ascertained as causative factor for this poisoning series (1). Firstly, the public was informed through a press conference about health hazards, if such marijuana should be smoked continuously. PIC published complementary information for patients on its website. Secondly, the local health authority arranged a regular service for anonymous blood collection and measurement of blood lead level (BLL) for marijuana consumers. Finally, a therapeutic guideline for this special situation was established. From October 2007 to June 2008, the BLL was measured in 599 persons, of whom 235 had BLL above the German human biomonitoring value (HBM I 100 µg/L), a further 163 had BLL above HBM II (150 µg/L for adolescents and women in child-bearing age; 250 µg/L for others). The highest BLL measured was 4570 µg/L. Due to the uncertainty of the consumers' histories it was impossible to establish a correlation between the BLL, the frequency of consumption and the severity of symptoms. All persons with BLL above HBM II were treated for at least four weeks with succimer. The majority of patients suffered recurrent intestinal cramps. By mistake exploratory laparotomy was carried out in one patient. **Conclusion:** Drug abuse should be considered in otherwise unexplained poisoning symptoms. Adulteration of illegal drugs may cause unexpected mass poisoning. The cooperation of treating physicians, hospitals, PIC, and local health authorities is absolutely necessary in such a situation. **References:** 1. Busse F, Omidi L, Timper K et al. Lead poisoning due to adulterated marijuana. *N Engl J Med.* 2008; 358: 1641-22.