

OCCUPATIONAL ALLERGY - WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM APPRENTICE STUDIES?

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For years occupational allergies have been among the most frequently recorded occupational diseases, and both the skin as well as the respiratory tract may be affected. An estimated 9 to 15% of adult asthma is caused by work-related exposure. Therefore, many efforts are being made to counteract the development of occupational asthma and allergies and try to keep the workplaces as healthy places. Although there are only few internationally recognized occupational exposure limit values for allergens in the workplace that are recommended to protect against the development of sensitization or allergic reactions, environmental control/exposure assessment is the cornerstone of prevention strategy. Due to the lack of standards, reduction of allergen exposure using appropriate risk management and exposure control strategies is advocated to be best practice. Especially in the case of exposure with high-molecular allergens, the incidence of work-related symptoms is higher in the first 2-3 years after starting exposure and therefore health assessment is recommended. Apprentice studies showed that starting career programs with exposure to high-molecular allergens a substantial frequency of individuals especially atopic background developed specific sensitization to work-related allergens. Occupational physicians recommend that adolescents with high risk profiles be examined every six months for the first 2-3 years of work, so that they can recognize signs of occupational allergic disease at an early stage and take prevention and/or counter measures. There is a need to improve education of adolescents and young adults with asthma as to the potential effects of work on asthma and about adoption of prevention measure.