

**Interesting Cases** 

# Acquired Methemoglobinaemia Secondary to Nitrobenzene Poisoning: A Case Report

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# INFO

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https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5203-8455 How to cite this article:

Badhya SS, Srikanth BK. Acquired Methemoglobinaemia Secondary to Nitrobenzene Poisoning: A Case Report. Postgrad J Pediatr Adol Med. 2022;1(2):21-23.

Date of Submission: 2022-07-29 Date of Acceptance: 2022-12-17

# ABSTRACT

Methemoglobinaemia occurs as a result of the oxidation of iron in haemoglobin from the ferrous state to the ferric state. Acquired methemoglobinaemia is one of the serious side effects occurring as a result of exposure to nitrate-containing compounds. Treatment of these patients usually involves the administration of methylene blue. Here, we have reported a 14-year-old adolescent with nitrobenzene poisoning.

**Keywords:** Poisoning, Methemoglobinaemia, Nitrobenzene, Methylene Blue

# Introduction

Adolescent poisoning is a common problem encountered in a paediatric emergency. Nitrobenzene is a potentially fatal compound used as a paint solvent and dye, and in rubber synthesis. Consumption of nitrobenzene leads to methemoglobinaemia. Early diagnosis of methemoglobinaemia and administration of methylene blue prevents mortality in these cases. We report a 14-yearold adolescent child with nitrobenzene poisoning.

# **Case Report**

A 14-year-old child came to our paediatric emergency room with a history of an alleged suicidal attempt by consumption of 20% nitrobenzene (Figure 1) 9 hours prior to presentation. She had presented with pain in abdomen and vomiting since then. There was no history of headache, chest pain, hurried breathing, drowsiness or convulsions.

On examination, she was conscious with a GCS of 14/15 with

an oxygen saturation of 60% in room air which improved to 68% with 5 L of oxygen. She had an odour of bitter almond with peripheral cyanosis. Except for mild epigastric tenderness, rest of the systemic examination was fairly normal.

A stomach wash was given. Blood was drawn, which appeared dark in colour (Figure 2) and was sent for investigations including blood gas analysis and serum methemoglobin levels. In view of hypoxia, a chest X-ray was done which was normal. Blood investigations showed raised bilirubin levels (max - 2 mg/dl), a slight drop in haemoglobin and serum methemoglobin levels of 6.2% (Figure 3). Rest of the investigations were normal. Injection methylene blue 1 mg/kg was given intravenously over 20 mins. This showed a dramatic improvement in her saturation to 86-88% within an hour. Two repeat doses of methylene blue were given 8 hours apart. She also received 500 mg/day of oral Vitamin C for 1 week. The following day her saturation improved to 92-94% at room air. Over the course of the

Postgraduate Journal of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine

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next few days, she showed good clinical improvement. On HEADSS screening, she was found to have a history of excessive usage of electronic gadgets (cell phones) and episodes of emotional outbursts and impulsive behaviour. Psychiatric assessment and counselling were done and she was discharged within a week.



Figure 1.20% Nitrobenzene Solution



Figure 2.Dark Brown Coloured Blood

Investigation         Observed Value         Unit         Biological Reference Interval           Meth-haemoglobin**         6.2         %         < 1.5           Medical Remarks: Kindly correlate clinically:         Interpretation:             Methemoglobin accumulation in erythrocytes is due to acquired and hereditary causes.             Methemoglobin accumulation in erythrocytes is due to acquired and hereditary causes.             Methemoglobin accumulation in erythrocytes is due to acquired and hereditary causes.             Acquired causes is most commonly encountered as a result of administration of medications such as local anaesthetic agents, especially prilocaine and benzocaine amy initite. Other drugs like chioroguine, dispone, nitrogyoen, nitrogrupusside, phenacetin, phenazoynidine, primaquine, quinches and sufficienties are naites, nitroglypein, nitrogrupusside, phenacetin, phenazoynidine, primaquine, quinches and sufficienties are also lead to accumulation of methemoglobin reductase are result of administration of methemoglobin reductase are result.         Congenital methemoglobin reductase (also called cytochrome Bi reductase or disphorase) in erythrocytes which is an autosomal recessive disorder           One of several intrinsic structural disorders of hemoglobin, called methemoglobin-Mi which are inherted as autosomal dominat.         -GPD deficiency           - QPD deficiency         - Pyruvate kinase deficiency	MAMATHA 279 V2558577	emale BR	Sample Collec R v diagnostic # 76/10 4th ma bangalore 560 PROCESSING Healthcare Ltd	s laboratory ain 15 cross ma 003 zone: out-0 6 LOCATION-1 0, Unit No. 409- roial Building-1,	BELLARY alleshwaram 11(os) Aetropolis 416, 4th	VID: 11208021926 Registered O 02/12/2020 02:22 PM Collected O 02/12/2020 Reported On 04/12/2020 03:15 PM
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Figure 3.Serum Methemoglobin Levels

#### Discussion

Nitrobenzene is an important component in the synthesis of various solvents and flowering agents. It has a bitter almond odour and is yellowish in colour with an oily texture. The first case reporting poisoning due to nitrobenzene was seen in 1886.<sup>1</sup> Lethal dose of nitrobenzene is around 1 gm to 10 gm.<sup>2</sup>

It may be absorbed through the skin, respiratory tract, and gastrointestinal tract, and its highest concentration accumulates in the liver, brain, blood, and stomach due to its lipophilic nature.<sup>2</sup>

The ingestion of nitrobenzene results in a condition called methemoglobinaemia. This condition causes the oxidation of iron present in the blood from the ferrous ( $Fe^{2+}$ ) to the ferric ( $Fe^{3+}$ ) state, which further leads to the blood turning brown, and the loss of the ability to transport oxygen.<sup>3</sup> Physiologically, a low level (< 1%) of haemoglobin is oxidised to methemoglobin. This low level is maintained due to the presence of two reductive pathways in the red blood cells, namely diaphorase pathways and HMP

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pathway. In nitrobenzene poisoning, due to oxidative stress, enhanced quantities of methemoglobin are produced.<sup>2</sup> There are various mechanisms helpful in the reduction of methemoglobin, for example, catalysis by cytochrome b5 reductase and alternate pathway using NADPH-dependent methemoglobin reductase system.<sup>4</sup>

In case of less than 10%-15% of methemoglobin, only cyanosis seems plausible (as in our case), however, the child will be usually asymptomatic. Levels above 20% cause tachypnoea, headache, chest pain, and dyspnoea. 40-50% of methemoglobin causes lethargy and confusion. It might also cause metabolic acidosis further resulting in seizures, coma, bradycardia, hypertension, and ventricular dysrhythmia. Methemoglobin levels above 70% are lethal. Some other effects are haemolytic anaemia, altered liver functions, contact dermatitis, and hepatosplenomegaly. Severe symptoms are generally found in children with anaemia and G6PD enzyme deficiency.<sup>5</sup>

Methylene blue is an effective antidote for methemoglobinaemia. The advised dosage is 1-2 mg/ kg (with a maximum of 50 mg dose in adults) given intravenously as a 1% solution over 5 minutes. If required, it can be repeated in one hour. At levels above 7 mg/kg, methylene blue acts as an oxidant and therefore may cause methemoglobinaemia in some individuals. For patients with methemoglobin levels of more than 30%, ascorbic acid (200-500mg/day) may be advised. The use of N-acetylcysteine in the treatment of methemoglobinaemia has been reported. Patients showing severe symptoms may be advised exchange transfusion. Cases with methemoglobin levels > 50% or those who are not responding to standard treatment are provided hyperbaric oxygen.<sup>5</sup>

# Conclusion

Nitrobenzene poisoning is rarely encountered in clinical practice. Hence high index of suspicion in cases of unknown compound consumption and the above-mentioned features should prompt us to think of acquired methemoglobinaemia as administration of methylene blue can be life saving in these cases.

# Source of Funding: None

# Conflict of Interest: None

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