Anaphylaxis in children and adolescents: the Portuguese Anaphylaxis Registry

Angela Gaspar¹, Natacha Santos², Emilia Faria³, Ana Pereira⁴, Eva Gomez⁵, Rita Câmara⁶, Rodrigo Rodrigues-Alves⁷, Luis Miguel Borrego⁸, Isabel Carrapatoso⁹, Leonor Carneiro-Leão⁹, Mário Morais-Almeida¹⁰, Luís Delgado¹¹, Elisa Pedro¹², and Manuel Branco-Ferreira¹²

¹Hospital da Luz Lisboa
²Centro Hospitalar Universitário Algarve
³Centro Hospitalar e Universitário de Coimbra EPE
⁴Hospital CUF Porto and Instituto CUF Porto
⁵Centro Hospitalar Universitário do Porto EPE
⁶Centro Hospitalar do Funchal
⁷Hospital do Divino Espírito Santo de Ponta Delgada EPE
⁸Universidade Nova de Lisboa Faculdade de Ciências Médicas
⁹Centro Hospitalar de São João EPE
¹⁰Hospital CUF Descobertas
¹¹University of Porto Faculty of Medicine
¹²Hospital de Santa Maria

September 16, 2020

Abstract

Background: Anaphylaxis is increasing at pediatric age; however, its characterization is hampered by underdiagnosis and underreporting. The aim of this study was to identify the causes of anaphylaxis in children and adolescents in Portugal, thus contributing to a better knowledge of its etiology, clinical manifestations and management. Methods: During a 10-year period a nationwide notification system for anaphylaxis was implemented, with voluntary reporting by allergists. Data on 533 patients under 18 years of age with anaphylaxis were included. Results: Mean age was 8.5 ± 4.9 years, 61% were male; 45% had asthma. Mean age at the first anaphylaxis episode was 5.3 ± 4.7 years (ranging from 1 month to 17 years of age), 63% at preschool age. Most reactions occurred at home (57%). Food-induced anaphylaxis was the leading cause (77%). The main culprit foods were cow’s milk (32%), tree nuts (16%), shellfish (13%), egg (12%), fresh fruits (11%), fish (8%) and peanut (8%). Other causes included drugs (11%), insect-sting (5%), cold-induced anaphylaxis (4%), exercise-induced (2%), latex (1%) and idiopathic anaphylaxis (1%). Most patients (83%) were admitted to the emergency department; only 46% received adrenaline treatment. Recurrence of anaphylaxis occurred in 41% of the patients (3 or more episodes in 21%). An adrenaline autoinjector was used in 9% of the patients. Conclusions: In the Portuguese pediatric population, food is the leading cause of anaphylaxis. Undertreatment with adrenaline and high recurrence of anaphylaxis highlight the need to improve both the diagnosis and the therapeutic management of this life-threatening entity.

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