

Reptile bite in pregnancy

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Reptile bites are rarely seen cases in emergency departments. But particularly in the warm summer months, the prevalence is relatively higher in rural areas. Snakebites during pregnancy is little known and only a few cases have been reported in the literature. However, in case of pregnancy, the outcomes may be different both for mother and the fetus. Interestingly, there is limited number of reptile bite cases during pregnancy in the literature. We report here a woman who was bitten at her 28th week of gestation. Obstetric consultation with ultrasonography was performed and seen that fetus was nor-

mal according to a 28-week gestation. We infused four vials of antiserum in a period of 1 h in a saline solution. In all, 30 min after the initiation of the antiserum infusion, the lesion started to regress. Her obstetric consultation was repeated 1 h, 36 h, and before discharge were performed and seen that the fetus was normal. After a period of five days, the patient and fetus were evaluated once more, and nothing was abnormal for both.

Key words: pregnancy; reptile bite; venom

Introduction

Reptile bites are rarely seen cases in emergency departments but the prevalence is relatively higher in rural areas, particularly in the warm summer months, when snakes and victims are most active. Most species of snakes are not venomous. For example, only 19 of the 115 snake species in the United States are venomous. In the past, it was estimated that mortality from venomous snakebite was around 25%.¹ Due to the availability of antivenom and advances in emergency and critical care, in those days, mortality rates are less than 0.5%.¹ For example, only five to ten deaths occur per year in the United States due to snake bites.¹ Probably, these numbers are higher in less developed regions of the world. In certain countries, snakebite is a major cause of death, so I disagree that snakebite is a relatively non-fatal injury.² However, in case of pregnancy, the outcomes may be different both for mother and the fetus. Interestingly, there is limited number of reported cases during pregnancy in the literature.^{3–7} We report here a woman who was bitten at her 28th week of gestation.

Case

A 27-year-old woman with a 28-week gestation was admitted to the Emergency Service of our hospital with a snakebite in the dorsal region of her left hand. The species of the snake may be *Vipera lebetina obtusa* because of it can often be found in the region of Çukur-

ova. She was bitten 75 min before admittance. In her physical examination, her left hand was edematous and painful in the distal half, and there was an ecchymotic region around the bitten area. Among her laboratory findings, hemoglobin and hematocrit levels were 12.8 g/dL and 39.1%, respectively. Her white blood cell and platelet counts were $8.8 \times 10^9/L$ and $211.0 \times 10^9/L$, respectively, and her peripheral blood smear sample, urinalysis, and routine biochemical parameters were normal. Obstetric consultation was performed; ultrasonographic examination showed a 28-week-old live fetus demonstrating normal biometry and anatomy and a normal placenta. Fetal movements were normal at ultrasonography and there were no uterine contractions at fetal cardiotocography. The edematous area on the dorsum of the hand was observed for each 30 min, and a progressive swelling was noted. After 4 h observation, the lesion occupied 3/4 of whole arm with an induration, probably due to a compartment syndrome. Nausea developed in the patient without vomiting. Because of the rapid progression of the lesion and development of nausea, we repeated the hematological and biochemical parameters again and infused four vials of antiserum (viper venom antiserum, European (equine) Institute of Immunology, Zagreb, Croatia) in a period of 1 h in a saline solution. In all, 30 min after the initiation of the antiserum infusion, the lesion started to regress. Her obstetric consultation was repeated 1 h after the infusion to evaluate the fetus, and there were no clinical signs of maternal or fetal urgency. Regression of the lesion accelerated, and it resolved completely after a period of 36 h. Before discharge, a third obstetric consultation was performed and seen that the fetus and

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mother were normal. After a period of five days, the patient and fetus were evaluated once more, and nothing was abnormal for both. Spontaneous vaginal delivery of a live-born baby weighing 3200 g occurred at 39 weeks of gestational age. The baby and mother were discharged from hospital at second postpartum day.

Discussion

Poison of snakes may be a complex enzyme mixture that causes local tissue injury, systemic vascular damage, hemolysis, fibrinolysis, and neuromuscular dysfunction, terminating with a combination of local and systemic endpoints. It may quickly alter blood vessel permeability, leading to loss of plasma and blood into the surrounding tissue and causing hypovolemia. It may also consume fibrinogen and platelets, causing a coagulopathy. In some species, specific venom fractions block neuromuscular transmission, leading to ptosis, respiratory failure, and other neurologic effects. But the species and size of the snake, the age and size of the victim, the time elapsed since the bite, and characteristics of the bite (location, depth, and number, the amount of venom injected) all affect the clinical manifestation. The severity of poisoning, following snakebite, therefore, varies.

The cardinal signs of poisoning are the presence of one or more fang marks, localized pain, and progressive edema extending from the bite site.⁸ Other early symptoms and signs are nausea and vomiting, weakness, oral numbness or tingling of tongue and mouth, tachycardia, dizziness, hematemesis, hematuria, thrombocytopenia, and fasciculations. In general, swelling becomes apparent within 15–30 min, but in some cases, it may not start for several hours. In severe cases, edema may progress to involve an entire limb within an hour. In less severe cases, edema may progress over a 1- to 2-day period. Edema near an airway or in a muscle compartment, probably as in our case due to the developed induration, may threaten life or limb without the presence of systemic effects.

Although the snake bite is a rare event in other regions of Turkey, it is very common in the southeast region of the country, probably due to its hot climate and agricultural status of the individuals. We see approximately 15–20 cases per week during summer months, but only a small proportion of the events are secondary to venomous snakes. The interesting side of this case was the pregnancy of the woman. It was a difficult case for us because there was a 28-week fetus and his life was probably in danger due to the venom. But there was probably

another risk secondary to the antiserum-related complications. We had not seen such a case before. Additionally, there were a limited number of such cases in the literature. Thus, we observed the case for a period under the close obstetric examination, but progression of the lesion forced us to use the antiserum. In the previous paper, the author reported that antivenom administration has been recommended for reptile bite during pregnancy.⁹ Fortunately, nothing happened adversely and a full recovery was obtained eventually.

As a conclusion, although snake bites are rare events in the Emergency Services and only minority of cases develop due to venomous snakes, it may be a difficult event in case of pregnancy due to the toxin and antiserum-related complications on fetus. A close observation for fetus and mother and more reports about the subject in the literature are required.

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