

M.P. PERERA, A. HORADAGODA AND C.E. DE SILVA

*Department of Veterinary Pre-Clinical Studies, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine & Animal Science, University of Peradeniya and General Hospital, Polonnaruwa.*

Cow milk, one of the first foreign proteins encountered by many infants, is one of the most common food allergens. Its mixture of more than 20 protein components have been implicated in a number of possible immunologically mediated reactions. This study was undertaken to determine the prevalence of cow milk allergy among Sri Lankans and to identify the nature of allergic reactions manifested by them.

A detailed questionnaire was administered to 3461 fresh cow milk consumers from 17 districts. In this study 386 people (11.6%) who claimed to have shown clinical symptoms which subsided on withdrawal of milk from the diet were considered to be allergic to cow milk.

Hypersensitivity reactions to cow milk were reported to provoke symptoms associated with the respiratory system (n=188), gastrointestinal system (n=117), nervous system (n=80), skin (n=46) and the cardiovascular system (n=3). One individual was reported to have shown anaphylactic reactions. In one instance an exclusively breastfed infant was reported to have developed respiratory distress when the mother consumed cow milk and clinical signs have subsided when the mother discontinued cow milk consumption.

A total of 334 individuals (86.5%) claimed to have developed allergies within 24 hours after consumption of fresh cow's milk suggesting the prevalence of immediate type hypersensitivity reactions. Fifty-two persons (13.5%) reported that they developed the signs after 2 - 7 days of consumption indicating delayed type hypersensitivity reactions.

When compared to results of similar studies carried out in western countries, the prevalence of cow milk allergy is high among Sri Lankans. The nature of the allergic reactions reported and the higher prevalence of immediate type hypersensitivity reactions among Sri Lankans are comparable with other countries.