



Metal Allergy: Palladium

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33.1 Introduction

Palladium (Pd) was discovered by William Hyde Wollaston in 1803 and named after the asteroid Pallas. Soon, it became clear that this metal had very interesting chemical properties. It had a great ability to absorb hydrogen (up to 900 times its own volume) and was therefore used as a catalyst in many (de)hydrogenation reactions. Today, Pd chemistry is still of great interest: in 2010 the Nobel Prize in chemistry was awarded to Richard F. Heck, Ei-ichi Negishi, and Akira Suzuki for Pd-catalysed cross-coupling in organic synthesis. Pd is widely used in chemical, electronic, and especially automotive industries as a catalyst [1], which taken together accounts for approximately 88.8% of the total Pd demand worldwide in 2013 (Table 33.1). Still, human exposure to Pd is mainly through contact with jewellery and dental appliances, which account for 4.0 and 5.3% of the total demand, respectively. There was demand for 15.9 tonnes of Pd for the dental industry worldwide in 2013 (Johnson & Matthey: www.platinum.matthey.com).

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Table 33.1 Palladium demand in tonnes for dental industry in various areas of the world

	2004	2009	2013
Europe	2.5	2.0	2.3
Japan	16.2	9.2	6.4
USA	7.3	8.1	6.7
China	0.2	–	–
Rest of the world	0.3	0.5	0.5
Total	26.4	19.8	15.9

Source: www.platinum.matthey.com

33.2 Bioactivity of Palladium

Pd is a group 10 metal in the periodic table and has close chemical resemblance with nickel (Ni) and platinum (Pt). The latter two metals have interesting bioactive properties. The metal Ni and its alloys are known for adverse reactions, especially allergic contact dermatitis, while Pt salts are well known in cancer treatment. As expected, there is cross-reactivity between Ni and Pd for allergic contact dermatitis, and broad spectrum organometallic Pd compounds are currently being explored as a possible cancer treatment [2]. Pd exists as a pure metal, alloy, inorganic salt, and organometallic compound. The pure metal and alloy can release ions and react to inorganic salts or organometallic compounds depending on the local environment. The synthetic inorganic salts or organometallic compounds are frequently used in catalysis. Pd and its compounds have a very low to moderate threshold for acute oral toxicity: about 200 to >4000 mg kg⁻¹ body weight

depending on the solubility of the Pd compound used [3–5]. However, intravenous administration results in much higher toxicity (6 mg kg⁻¹ body weight) [4].

33.3 Palladium Release

Considerable amounts of Pd are released from dental alloys in *in vitro* and *in vivo* studies [6–11]. As explained before, this release is influenced by the composition and microstructure of the alloy and the surrounding environment [11]. Pd-containing dental alloys were reported to release up to 33.7 µg/cm²/week of metal ions in a corrosive test solution [12]. Precious dental alloys can be divided into two major groups: gold (Au)-based and Pd-based and Pd-based alloys can be subdivided into silver (Ag) and copper (Cu) alloys (Table 33.2).

Measurable levels of Pd and other components of dental alloys are found in saliva and oral mucosa cells, which is consistent with release of Pd from dental appliances [8, 13, 14]. Also, samples of serum and urine of patients with Pd monosensitization were found to have significantly elevated concentrations of Pd, with the highest in urine, suggesting a predominantly renal excretion of Pd. Amounts in serum were, however, not significant [13]. These levels were shown to return to normal values when the appliances were removed from the oral cavity, along with a remission of symptoms. Levels of released Pd from dental appliances correlated to oral clinical symptoms and to skin sensitization to Pd. Also, specific induction of IFN-γ responses in periph-

eral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) was detected in Pd-sensitized individuals [13].

33.4 Adverse Reactions Towards Palladium

The first report on Pd allergy (1955) describes a 35-year-old housewife who suffered from contact dermatitis on her left fourth finger, on which she wore a 90 wt% Pd-containing wedding ring [15]. In 1969, a case of contact allergy to Pd was reported by a chemist working with noble metal salts, including Na₍₂₇₎PdCl₄ [16]. Occupational exposure to Pd is infrequent but may also occur in dental technicians, miners, and workers in the electronics and chemical industries [1, 9, 17].

Although Pd has been used in dental alloys for almost a century [18], its wide-scale use started in the 1970s due to increasing gold prices [19]. Shortly thereafter, Pd allergies emerged in the literature more frequently [19]. The first report on Pd allergies from dental alloys was documented by two Dutch researchers, van Ketel and Nieboer [20].

Japan has long been the largest Pd-consuming region for dental applications, followed by North America and then Europe, although Japan's demand has decreased substantially in the last years (Table 33.1). Interestingly, Pd allergy prevalence seems to be distributed similarly, that is, 7–24% in Japan [21, 22], 8.5–13.3% in the USA [23–25], and 4.9 (Germany)–11.7% (Spain) [26, 27] in Western Europe. In Europe, much more data is available, and there are considerable variations between Northern and Southern European

Table 33.2 Sub-classification of the Pd-based dental alloys based on weight percentage according to the American Dental Association (ADA)

Classification	Percentage of noble metals	Subgroups	Most important components
High-noble	≥60% Au + Pt + Pd (>40% Au)	Au-based alloys	Au-Pt Au-Pd
		Pd-based alloys	Pd-Au (>40Au)
Noble	≥25% Au + Pt + Pd	Pd-based alloys	Pd-Au (<40Au) Pd-Ag Pd-Cu
		Ag-based alloys	Ag-Pd

countries [17]. Several extensive studies (including between 542 and 4446 patients) described the difference in prevalence between gender in dermatitis patients: 17.1% vs. 3.1% in Spain; 14.8% vs. 2.5% in Turkey; 14.9% vs. 3.2% in Minnesota, USA; and 6.7% vs. 2.3% in Italy for women and men, respectively [26, 28–30]. Most reports on Pd allergy are related to dental alloys and oral disease [20, 31–44]. This clearly shows the importance of dental alloys as the main source of exposure.

Until the introduction of a new test allergen for use in patch testing, the prevalence of Pd monosensitization ranged from 0.2% [17] to 1.6%, while the prevalence of Pd sensitization in association with Ni sensitization was 13.0% [13]. The salt normally used in epicutaneous patch testing for diagnosis of Pd allergy was, until 2007, Pd chloride, PdCl₂ (1–2% in petrolatum or in water), which forms an oligomeric or polymeric structure with water, accounting for a very poor solubility of this salt. As such, skin penetration, of which epicutaneous patch testing highly depends, might be impaired and thus results in false negatives. Sodium tetrachloropalladate, Na₂PdCl₄, at 3%, was shown to be a much more accurate test allergen for epicutaneous patch testing, mainly due to its solubility in water and monomeric structure [45–47]. In fact, the results of patch testing with this new test salt showed much higher rates of Pd sensitization, which meant that previously Pd sensitization possibly had been largely underestimated (Fig. 33.1). A

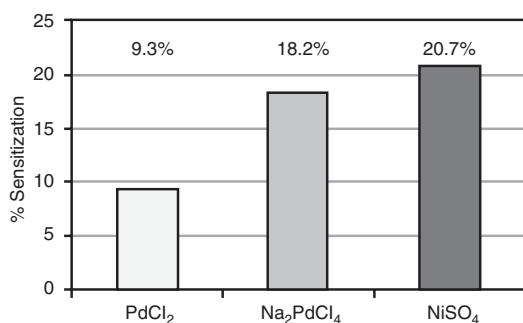


Fig. 33.1 Positive skin test results (+, ++, and +++) to 1% or 2% PdCl₂, 3% Na₂PdCl₄, and 5% NiSO₄ from a multicentre study in Europe among 1651 dermatitis patients (Data adapted from [48])

multicentre study in Europe, where 3% Na₂PdCl₄ was used, showed that prevalence of Pd monosensitization increased from 1.6% to 4.2% and that Pd sensitization prevalence increased from 9.3% to 18.2% among dermatitis patients [48]. Interestingly, the rate of Pd sensitization was similar to that of Ni (6–7%) [49]. Furthermore, the results of that study support the previous suggestion [50] that Pd might be a more potent sensitizer than Ni, since a formulation of the new Pd salt including fewer atoms was sufficient for elicitation and likely also sensitization [51].

In contrast with that of Ni, Pd (mono)sensitization is not related to female sex, which relates to the different sources of exposure of the two metals [49]. The prevalence of Pd allergy is higher in female patients, because it goes together with the prevalence of Ni sensitization, which is higher in women and which relates to the contact with jewellery. Thus, different sources of exposure are expected.

Although most Pd allergy cases are related to dental alloys, a few describe clinically relevant allergic contact dermatitis to Pd [15, 16, 52, 53]. Several authors have described Pd-induced sarcoidal-type allergic contact granulomas due to body piercings [33, 54–59]. Some have discussed the relevant systemic allergic contact dermatitis to dental Pd [21, 34, 40, 60, 61]. Notably, a recent report described allergic contact gastritis due to a Pd-containing dental bridge [38]. It must be stated that patients who are allergic to Pd rarely exhibit a reaction to skin exposure to the metal [17, 62].

Despite the numerous case reports describing adverse reactions to Pd-containing dental alloys, the clinical relevance of positive patch tests to Pd is still unclear, or at least difficult to assess. One of the reasons is that the clinical picture of Pd-induced allergic contact stomatitis is ambiguous. Furthermore, it's possible that no oral lesions may be present in the case of systemic contact allergy to dental materials, as pointed out in several case reports; instead, systemic complaints or lesions could be atypical, e.g. gastritis or alopecia. Pd sensitization, as measured by positive patch tests, is frequently found in the absence of clinical relevance, both intra- and extra-orally.

Case reports showed that strongly palladium-sensitized individual appeared to have relatively mild contact dermatitis reactions [62, 63]. Furthermore, Pd allergic patients' lack of awareness of the presence of dental alloys and/or their composition complicates the evaluation of clinical relevance considerably.

Pd allergies have been estimated to be overall equally prevalent in dermatitis and oral disease patients at 7–8% (range < 1 up to 24% worldwide) [17, 21]. However, this figure is based on studies that have evaluated either dermatitis or oral disease patients. Therefore, interregional, interindividual, and inter-laboratory variation, as well as test materials used, the number of patients, and the period of testing, could skew these observations. Moreover, some investigators marked a 2+ reaction as positive, while others scored a 1+ reaction as positive, and patch test readings were done at various different time points and frequencies. Finally, because Pd is not included in standard patch test series but is rather part of specific 'metal', 'oral disease', or 'dental' screening series, it is not always clear what specific patients have been tested. Studies that compare the prevalence of dermatitis and oral disease patients are scarce, but they do indicate a higher prevalence among patients with oral disease relative to those with dermatitis. One study reported that, among 106 Pd-sensitized patients, 55.7% suffered from oral disease and 29.2% from allergic contact dermatitis [29]. An older study retrospectively comparing patients with intra-oral complaints ($n = 397$) to patients suffering from eczema ($n = 112$) showed that especially gold and Pd sensitivity were significantly increased in the dental patient group: 23% vs. 6% for gold and 8% vs. <1% for Pd [64]. Another important issue to address in this context is the cross-reactivity between nickel and Pd.

33.4.1 Cross-Reactivity to Nickel and Concomitant Reactivity to Other Metals

The relevance of a positive patch test reaction to Pd is likely compromised by potential cross-reac-

tions to nickel, even though exclusive positive reactions to Pd are also reported continuously and appear to be more prevalent in recent years [17]. The simultaneous positive reactions of nickel and Pd are explained by (1) sensitization to both metals, (2) contamination of the Pd patch test material with traces of nickel (despite the fact that several studies have disproved this theory) [50], and (3) the fact that nickel and Pd have similar chemistry and electron arrangements, which could cause cross-reactivity at the T-cell level [65, 66]. It has also been shown that nickel and Pd form similar complexes with sulphur ligands [67], which may explain why both metals form similar metal-protein complexes as suggested by Santucci [68]. Hindsén et al. [69] provided in vivo evidence for cross-reactivity to nickel and Pd by systemic administration. They produced flare-up reactions on sites previously patch tested with nickel and Pd after oral exposure to nickel. In this study, contamination was excluded by chemical analysis.

Other metals often produce positive patch test results in Pd-sensitized patients. In Spain, researchers found concomitant reactivity to nickel (97%), cobalt (36%), and chromium (13%) [26]. These figures are similar to findings in Austria [70]. In the USA, the instance of co-sensitization to nickel was considerably less (57.0%) and was strikingly only slightly higher than that for gold (48.2%) [29]. In the latter report, co-sensitization to cobalt and chromium was measured at 37.6% and 10.2%, respectively.

33.4.2 Palladium-Induced Immune Responses

Since palladium exposure is mainly due to dental applications, exposure is mainly to the oral mucosa. Clinically, this can result in, for example, non-plaque-related gingivitis (Fig. 33.2). Even though an association was evident, in many cases, this was not always reflected by a systemic Pd-induced immune response. Apparently, not all cases of non-plaque-related gingivitis are caused by allergic pathways (Th-1 or Th-2), but rather a local innate immune response may be responsi-



Fig. 33.2 An example of non-plaque-related gingivitis around the metal bridge

ble for the inflammation. In the human body, both Ni and Pd can directly activate the innate immune system through toll-like receptor 4 (TLR-4) [71]. This means that non-plaque-related gingivitis does not necessarily result from allergy but could simply be an innate immune response, functioning much the same way as irritant contact dermatitis/stomatitis. Innate effects were investigated by using *in vitro* cultures based on human monocyte-derived dendritic cells (MoDC) and THP-1 cells [72]. These cells were exposed to different metals, with and without an endotoxin (lipopolysaccharide; LPS). IL-8 production was used as a parameter for innate stimulation. The results showed that Pd and Au of the dental alloys, and especially PdCu alloys, can trigger the innate immune response. In these experiments, the innate immune response was enhanced when bacterial endotoxins, like LPS, were added to the medium.

Systemic effects of Pd were investigated in well-defined positive and negative control patients using patch test results from testing with Na_2PdCl_4 and NiSO_4 as the gold standard [73]. A lymphocyte proliferation test (LPT) and specific cytokine production profiles (Th1, IFN- γ ; Th2, IL-5 and IL-13) were used to investigate the systemic effect measured by using peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs). It was found that, in contrast to IFN- γ (Th1), the Ni- and Pd-induced production of Th2 cytokines (IL-5 and IL-13) were good predictors for sensitization based on patch testing. Although the findings with regard to Th2 cytokines correspond

to results of Minang et al. [74], they were in conflict with previous research that showed predominant Th1 responses in Ni-allergic patients. Pd-induced LPT showed good specificity (95%), meaning that only very few false-positive results were obtained. However, it lacked sensitivity (63%), meaning that several false-negative results were found. High specificity is especially useful in cases of a positive patch test with unclear clinical relevance. Pd-induced LPT was found to be strongly related to present exposure to Pd (e.g. the presence of Pd-based dental alloys), clinical anomalies, and even subjective complaints [75]. In cases of sensitization in the absence of exposure, the LPT is more likely to be negative. LPT could therefore be useful to differentiate between clinically relevant patch test results and irrelevant ones. Finally, positive LPT results could (further) support an indication for invasive dental replacement treatment in tricky cases.

Ultimately, the so-called ‘irrelevant’ positive patch test results still have some relevance, since it is clear that patients with positive patch test results to metals, regardless of possible clinical relevance, should not receive dental appliances containing these metals. It is also important to realize that a negative patch test result to a specific metal does not guarantee the ability to safely use that metal on a patient in the future, because the patient may not have been previously exposed; an allergy could still develop after patch testing. For the dermatologist and the general dental practitioner, it is important to realize that dental alloys are possible sources of metal exposure that may contribute to (metal-induced) skin disease, even in the absence of oral lesions.

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