

ALLERGIC SYMPTOMS AMONG FRESHMEN IN VETERINARY MEDICINE - A CROSS SECTIONAL SURVEY TO ACCESS TO THE ALLERGOVET COHORT STUDY

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Practical work in veterinary medicine provides exposure to various allergens with an increased risk of sensitization. With the ongoing longitudinal study 'AllergoVet', we are investigating prevalence and incidence of allergic symptoms and sensitization among veterinary students before and during their studies taking into account exposure patterns at the university campus and in their leisure time. Here we report results from an accompanying survey on anamnestic allergies in freshmen.

Between 2013 and 2016, 553 out of 880 freshmen in a university department of veterinary medicine voluntarily answered a questionnaire on allergies in the past (response rate: 63%). The proportion of women was 83%. The median age was 20 years (IQR: 19 - 22 years). Interest in participating in the main study was expressed by 294 students (53%) ("candidates").

The following prevalence rates for allergic diseases were identified: hay fever 71 (13%), allergic asthma 38 (6.9%), atopic eczema 47 (8.5%), allergic contact dermatitis 44 (8.0%) and animal allergy (excl. insect venom) 22 (4.0%). Among the group of "candidates" (N = 294) and the group of "non-candidates" (N = 259), the following differences in prevalence were found: hay fever 13.5% vs 12.2%, allergic asthma 9.9% vs 3.5%, eczema 9.5% vs 7.3%, allergic contact dermatitis 8.8% vs 6.9%, and animal allergy 4.1% vs. 3.9%. However, the difference was statistically significant only in allergic asthma (p=0,003).

A pre-existing allergy could have slightly increased the motivation to participate in 'AllergoVet-study'. A minor selection bias should be considered in later interpretations of study results.

KEYWORDS: prevalence of allergies, students, allergic asthma, veterinary medicine