Eye cancer in a young male with a vaping history

Carol L Shields, Min Kim, Sara E Lally, Patricia Chévez-Barrios, Jerry A Shields

We report a new observation of conjunctival intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) in a young man following years of electronic cigarette use. A 22-year-old man with a 5-year electronic cigarette use (vaping) developed painless unilateral blurred vision in the right eye from mild superficial corneal opacification, unresponsive to topical antiviral therapy. Corneal scraping documented no infectious etiology. The abnormality persisted for 1 year and superficial keratectomy revealed high-grade CIN with enlarged pleomorphic and dyskeratotic cells. Interferon-alpha-2b was instituted. In this case, chronic exposure to electronic cigarette vapors (vaping) could have been associated with CIN in this young patient.

Key words: Cancer, conjunctiva, electronic cigarettes, eye, squamous cell carcinoma, vaping

Electronic cigarettes were introduced in the United States in 2006 and touted as a safer alternative to standard cigarettes. This product has become popular, especially among young adults. Electronic cigarette produce vapor rather than smoke, hence the activity is termed vaping rather than smoking.

Within the past year, vaping-related serious lung disease (acute respiratory distress) has surfaced, often requiring intensive care monitoring on a ventilator.[1] The first vaping-related death was reported in August 2019 and there have been over 1000 vaping-related illnesses, most often in young males ≤35 years of age.

Standard cigarette use is well-documented to impact risk for head and neck cancer, including conjunctival malignancies.[2] There is limited literature on cancer related to electronic cigarette use.[3,4] A systematic review of articles addressing electronic cigarettes and head/neck cancers found that vaping exposure could lead to DNA damage with increased oxidative stress, especially in flavored products.[5] Electronic cigarettes aerosols can promote DNA damage and impair DNA repair with potential for carcinogenesis.[6,7] A PubMed search for < electronic cigarette eye >, < electronic cigarette conjunctiva >, and < electronic cigarette eye cancer > yielded corneal chemical toxicities with tear film abnormalities, but no case of malignancy. Herein, we describe vaping-related conjunctival squamous neoplasia in a young male.

Case Report

A male in his early 20s noted painless blurred vision and was found to have possible viral keratitis, which did not respond to oral antiviral therapy. One year later, corneal scraping revealed atypical epithelial cells and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) documented the lack of infectious etiology. Subsequently, 1 year later, superficial keratotomy demonstrated full-thickness atypia with mitotic activity, enlarged pleomorphic and dyskeratotic cells, and thickened basement membrane, suggesting conjunctival intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) with high-grade features. [Fig. 1] Immunohistochemistry surrogate marker for HPV-driven lesions (p16) was negative. Interferon-alpha-2b (1 million international units/cc) was instituted and the patient was referred to us.

On examination, visual acuity was 20/30 in the right eye (OD) and 20/25 in the left eye (OS). There was limbal pannus with diffuse epithelial thickening and opacification OD involving 95% of the corneal surface, sparing only a superonasal sector. [Fig. 2] A subtle gelatinous limbal mass was noted superotemporally, measuring 8 mm in diameter. Anterior segment optical coherence tomography confirmed epithelial thickening of 110–180 µm (normal 52.2–54.6 µm). [Fig. 2] The left eye was normal.

The patient denied immune suppression, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), organ transplantation, and xeroderma pigmentosum. He admitted to vaping flavored (mint) electronic cigarettes for 5 continuous years (5 vapes per day or more). He denied cigarette smoking. Topical interferon was continued for 3 additional months.

Discussion

In an analysis of 5002 conjunctival tumors, squamous neoplasia, (CIN and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC)), represented 715 (14%) cases.[8] This malignancy most often occurred in older adults (>60 years) (n = 494/715, 69%) or mid-adults (41–60 years) (n = 181/715, 25%) and rarely occurred in young adults (21–40 years) (n = 38/715, 5%) or children (≤20 years) (n = 2/715, <1%).[9] Typically those...
Figure 1: Intraepithelial corneal neoplasia. (a) Histopathology demonstrates corneal full-thickness atypia, loss of cellular polarity, and dyskeratosis (eosinophilic cells). (Hematoxylin-eosin, original magnification 20×). (b) Higher magnification shows pleomorphic cells and frequent atypical mitoses (arrows) in the superficial layers of the epithelium. (Hematoxylin-eosin, original magnification 40×). (c) PAS stain highlights the abnormally thickened basement membrane and shows the atypical mitosis (arrow). (Periodic Acid Schiff, original magnification 40×). (d) Full-thickness epithelial proliferation is demonstrated by Ki67 nuclear cell proliferation marker (brown nuclei). (Mib-1 antibody, DAB chromogen, immunohistochemistry original magnification 40×).

Figure 2: (a) Corneal epithelial opacification from intraepithelial neoplasia (arrows) is seen on the entire corneal surface, sparing a superonasal sector. (b) On the anterior segment, optical coherence tomography, the corneal epithelial thickening (arrows) demonstrated smooth surface, increased optical reflectivity, and thickness of 110–80 μm.

with immune suppression, HIV, organ transplantation, or xeroderma pigmentosum, not found in this case.

Conclusion
To our knowledge, the squamous neoplasia in this young male could be related to the 5-year chronic vapor exposure from electronic cigarettes. Although more data is needed to prove this correlation, we understand that e-cigarettes contain variable amounts of potential carcinogens that could result in malignancy, as seen in this young patient. All patients with squamous neoplasia should be examined regarding the use of standard or electronic cigarettes.

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Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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We report a case of intraconal grease gun injury along with traumatic optic neuropathy in a 20-year-old male. He presented with dimness of vision and proptosis of the left eye (LE) following an accidental injury at work place. The computer tomography of orbit revealed hypodense grease orbit. Cream colored grease was continually exuding from the conjunctival wound. Patient improved rapidly after the surgical removal of the grease by anterior orbitotomy. Grease gun injuries to the orbit have rarely been reported. The present case is the eighth report throughout the world, and the first in India as per our knowledge.

Key words: Grease gun injury, intraconal grease, traumatic optic neuropathy

Grease is a thixotropic lubricant agent containing calcium, sodium, or lithium-soap jelly emulsified with mineral oil. It liquefies when agitated and solidifies when at rest. Grease guns are commonly used in factory workshop to apply grease under pressure to lubricate the parts of machines. The pressure increases up to 621–1034 kPa and ejects grease (a velocity comparable to the muzzle velocity of a rifle bullet).

Grease gun injuries can cause mechanical and chemical damage of tissue. Chemical damage is less than those of other chemical substances due to its high viscosity and low tissue toxicity. However, the high pressure of grease gun can lead to focal penetration and blunt dissection along the tissue planes. Any part of the body can be injured, but the commonest sites are the fingers and hands. Grease gun injuries of the orbit are very rare, and only seven cases have been published in the literature so far.

Case Report

A 20-year-old male presented with chief complaints of dimness of vision, pain, and swelling of the left eye since morning following a trauma at his work place. He gave a history of an accidental injury in LE due to escape of grease with high velocity from a JCB machine while working on it. Immediately he consulted a local ophthalmologist; some amount of grease material was removed there and was referred to our center.

On examination, this presenting visual acuity was finger count at 1 meter in the left eye with accurate PR and 20/20 in the right eye. In the LE, there was swelling of the eye lids and the globe was tensed and chemosed. There was proptosis of 5 mm (measured with plastic scale) with restriction of movements in adduction and elevation. The conjunctiva was congested and chemosed, but no gross laceration was detected. Yellowish colored grease material was found underneath the medial and lower fornix. On mild pressure over the lower lid yellowish grease material was found to be coming out through the lower fornix.

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