

**Immunotoxicity of 2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin (TCDD)
and Diethylstilbestrol (DES) in the Fetal Mouse Thymus and Liver**

By

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Abstract

Diethylstilbestrol (DES) and 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin (TCDD) have been identified as immunotoxicants causing thymic atrophy, thymocyte hypocellularity, phenotypic changes detected by CD4 and CD8 surface antigens, and progenitor T-cell targeting in the fetal mouse. We hypothesized that gestational exposure to these two compounds may lead to comparable histologic and gene expression alterations in the fetal mouse thymus and liver. Treatment of pregnant C57Bl/6 mice with doses of 5 or 10 µg/kg TCDD or 48 µg/kg DES by oral gavage on gestation days (gd) 14 and 16 severely depressed day 18 thymic cellularity. Histologic evaluation of day 18 fetal thymuses showed disruption of normal cortico-medullary architecture after TCDD or DES. Decreased thymocytes density was noted primarily in cortical zones where pyknotic cells were increased by either TCDD or DES treatment. Using day 18 thymocyte suspensions and flow cytometry, 7-AAD showed decreases in viable thymocytes from TCDD- or DES-treated fetal mice, and concomitant increases in thymocytes in early apoptosis. When thymocytes were co-identified with CD4 and CD8 cell surface antigen expression, enhanced apoptosis occurred in CD4⁺CD8⁺ phenotype after TCDD treatment. After DES exposure, increased apoptosis occurred in CD4⁻CD8⁻ and CD4⁻CD8⁺ thymocytes. Both TCDD and DES increased liver to body weight ratios and decreased ratios of hematopoietic cells to hepatic cells present. Cytomegaly was seen in hepatocytes of TCDD and DES treated animals, and these cells had more variable features, such as increased cytoplasmic basophilia and more prominent nucleoli. Real time quantitative PCR demonstrated that DES decreased c-jun, bcl-2, and PKCα mRNA expression. These results suggest a shift away from proliferative activity and may reflect alterations noted predominantly in the hematopoietic population. TCDD increased c-jun mRNA expression with modest decreases in PKCα, and marked decreases in p53 also noted. Decreases in p53 suggest a pro-proliferative

status of hepatic cells, while decreases in PKC α may indicated decreases in phosphorylation of substrates required for normal cell cycle progression. The increased c-jun suggests that this gene may play a role in the hepatocyte hyperplasia, as well as the diminution of hematopoiesis.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my clinical pathology residency advisor, Dr. Bernard F. Feldman, who was a constant source of reassurance and motivation; to my son, Jake, whose presence brought balance to my life; to my mother, Esther, for her words that strengthened my resolve; to Renee and Kurt, Barbara and Margaret, and to the rest of my family and friends for their support and encouragement during this final stage of my academic training.

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DECLARATION OF WORK PERFORMED

I declare that I, Elizabeth Gayle Besteman, performed all of the work performed in this dissertation except that which is identified below.

Joan Kalnitsky operated the flow cytometer. Steve Holladay and Bonnie Smith assisted in harvesting thymus and liver tissues respectively. The Histopathology Laboratory at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital at Virginia Tech prepared the tissue samples for microscopic evaluation after formalin fixation. Susanne Aref of the Statistical Counseling Center at Virginia Tech performed the analysis of the gene expression data.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Declaration of Work Performed	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Abbreviation	xi
PART I INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW	2
1.1 Immune System as a Target for Toxicity	2
1.2 Human Exposure to TCDD and DES	4
1.3 Laboratory Modeling	8
1.4 Ontogeny of the Thymus	9
1.5 The Estrogen Receptor	13
1.6 The Aryl Hydrocarbon Receptor	15
1.7 Effects of TCDD and DES on the Immune System	18
1.8 Targets of DES and TCDD: The Thymus and its Hematopoietic Precursors	22
1.9 Effects of TCDD and DES on the Developing Immune System	31
1.10 Effects of TCDD and DES Related to Thymic Atrophy	35
1.11 Molecular Targets of TCDD and DES	39
1.12 Hypothesis	43
References	44
PART II MATERIALS AND METHODS	53
Chapter 2: MATERIALS AND METHODS	54
PART III RESULTS	56
Chapter 3: TETRACHLORODIBENZO-<i>P</i>-DIOXIN (TCDD) INHIBITS DIFFERENTIATION AND INCREASES APOPTOTIC CELL DEATH OF PRECURSOR T-CELLS IN THE FETAL MOUSE THYMUS	57
3.1 Abstract	58
3.2 Introduction	59
3.3 Materials and Methods	60
3.4 Results	63
3.5 Discussion	65
References	70

Chapter 4: DIETHYLSTILBESTROL (DES)-INDUCED FETAL THYMIC ATROPHY IN C57BL/6 MICE: INHIBITED THYMOCYTE DIFFERENTIATION AND INCREASED APOPTOTIC CELL DEATH	84
4.1 Abstract	85
4.2 Introduction	86
4.3 Materials	87
4.4 Results	91
4.5 Discussion	93
References	96
Chapter 5: HEPATOMEGALY AND DIMINISHED HEMATOPOIESIS IN C57BL/6 FETAL MICE AFTER EXPOSURE TO 2,3,7,8-TETRACHLORO-DIBENZO- <i>P</i> -DIOXIN (TCDD), AND AGENT THAT TARGETS PROGENITOR IMMUNE CELLS: RELATIONSHIP TO ALTERED C-JUN, PCK α , AND P53 EPXRESSION	110
5.1 Abstract	111
5.2 Introduction	112
5.3 Materials and Methods	113
5.4 Results	116
5.5 Discussion	118
References	125
Chapter 6: LATE GESTATION DIETHYLSTILBESTROL EXPOSURE IN C57BL/6 MICE CAUSES HEPATOCELLULAR CYTOMEGALY, RELATIVE HEPATOMEGALY, AND DIMINISHED HEMATOPOIESIS: CORRELATION WITH DECREASES IN BLC-2, PCK α , AND C-JUN EXPRESSION	141
6.1 Abstract	142
6.2 Introduction	143
6.3 Materials and Methods	144
6.4 Results	148
6.5 Discussion	149
References	156
PART IV CONCLUSIONS	175
Chapter 7: CONCLUSIONS	176

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Chapter 1	
Summary Table 1.1	42
Chapter 3	
Table 3.1 Effect of TCDD on thymic weight and cellularity	77
Table 3.2 Percentage of CD4 and CD8 thymocytes after TCDD	78
Table 3.3 Cellularity of CD4 and CD8 thymocytes after TCDD	79
Chapter 4	
Table 4.1 DES effect on thymic weight and cellularity	103
Table 4.2 DES effect on body weight, thymic weight, and weight ratios	103
Table 4.3 Effect of DES on thymocyte CD4 and CD8 populations	104
Table 4.4 Cell number by phenotype defined by CD4 and CD8	104
Table 4.5 Effect of DES on thymocyte viability and apoptosis	105
Chapter 5	
Table 5.1 Pooled/individual liver and body weights after TCDD	136
Table 5.2 Hepatocyte and hematopoietic cell counts after TCDD	137
Chapter 6	
Table 6.1 Pooled/individual liver and body weights after DES	170
Table 6.2 Hepatocyte and hematopoietic cell counts after DES	171

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Chapter 3	
Figure 3.1 A and B, Representative histograms, control and TCDD	80
Figure 3.2 A and B, GD18 Fetal thymuses, 40x magnification	81
Figure 3.3 A and B, GD18 Fetal thymuses, 100x magnification	82
Figure 3.4 A and B, GD18 Fetal thymuses, 500x magnification	83
Chapter 4	
Figure 4.1 A and B, Representative histograms, control and DES	106
Figure 4.2 A and B, GD18 Fetal thymuses, 40x magnification	107
Figure 4.3 A and B, GD18 Fetal thymuses, 100x magnification	108
Figure 4.4 A and B, GD18 Fetal thymuses, 500x magnification	109
Chapter 5	
Figure 5.1 A and B, GD18 Fetal livers, 400x magnification	138
Figure 5.2 A and B, GD18 Fetal livers, 600x magnification	139
Figure 5.3 Gene expression normalized to control mRNA	140
Chapter 6	
Figure 6.1 A and B, GD18 Fetal livers, 400x magnification	172
Figure 6.2 A and B, GD18 Fetal livers, 600x magnification	173
Figure 6.3 Gene expression normalized to control mRNA	174

ABBREVIATIONS

7-AAD	7-aminoactinomycinD
AhR	aryl hydrocarbon receptor
APC	antigen presenting cells
ARNT	aryl hydrocarbon nuclear translocator protein
BERKO	estrogen receptor beta knockout
cDNA	complementary deoxyribonucleic acid
CFU-GM	colony forming unit-granulocyte macrophage
CT	comparative threshold
DC	dendritic cell
DERKO	double estrogen receptor knockout
DES	diethylstilbestrol
DEX	dexamethasone
DN	double negative
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
DP	double positive
E2	estradiol
ER	estrogen receptor
ERKO	estrogen receptor alpha knockout
FITC	fluorescein isothiocyanate
FTOC	fetal thymus organ culture
GD	gestation day
HAH	halogenated aromatic hydrocarbon
HBSS	Hanks buffered salt solution
IL	interleukin
mRNA	messenger ribonucleic acid
NK	natural killer cell
NOAEL	no observable adverse effect
OVA	ovalbumin
PCDD	polychlorinated dibenzodioxin
PCDF	polychlorinated dibenzofuran
PCB	polychlorinated biphenyl
PCR	polymerase chain reaction
PE	phycoerythrin
PFC	plaque forming cell
RTPCR	reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction
SP	single positive
SRBC	sheep red blood cell
TCD	3, 3', 4, 4'-tetrachlorobiphenyl
TCDD	2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo- <i>p</i> -dioxin
TcR	T cell receptor
Tdt	terminal deoxynucleotidyl transferase
TEQ	toxic equivalency factors
TG	transgenic
TUNEL	terminal dUTP nick end labeling

kg
g
mg
μg
mL
μL

kilogram
gram
milligram
microgram
milliliter
microliter