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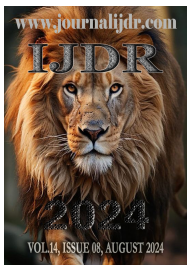

REVIEW ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

ENHANCING HEALTHCARE THROUGH EARLY DRUG ALLERGY DETECTION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

[1]AL Mutairy Khaled Ayed, [2]Hazazi Abdulrahman Yahya, [2]AL Harthi Ayidh Saad, [3]AL Sulami Khalid Azizallah Abdulaziz, [3]Asiri Amjad Matuq Abdullah and [3]AL Knani Mutaz Ismil

[1]Prince Sultan Military Medical City, Ministry of Defense; [2]Ministry of National Guard Health Affairs; [3]King Abdul-Aziz University Hospital

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****Corresponding Author:***
AL Mutairy Khaled Ayed,

ABSTRACT

Drug allergies are a significant cause of adverse drug reactions (ADRs), affecting patient safety and healthcare outcomes. Early detection of drug allergies is crucial for preventing these reactions and improving clinical care. This systematic review explores the current methods of early drug allergy detection, including patient history, skin testing, in vitro tests, and emerging genomic approaches. Findings indicate that accurate early identification of drug allergies, particularly with the use of skin testing and electronic health records (EHR)-based alerts, reduces the likelihood of adverse reactions and unnecessary drug avoidance. In vitro testing, including drug-specific IgE and basophil activation tests, provides non-invasive alternatives, while pharmacogenomic data show promise for predicting hypersensitivity in the future. The review emphasizes the importance of integrating detection methods into healthcare systems to enhance medication safety, lower healthcare costs, and improve patient outcomes. However, challenges remain, such as mislabeling allergies, limited access to testing in some settings, and the need for standardized protocols. Further research is recommended to develop more accessible testing methods and explore the long-term impact of early drug allergy detection on healthcare systems.

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INTRODUCTION

Drug allergies are a type of adverse drug reaction (ADR) mediated by the immune system and can range from mild reactions, such as skin rashes, to severe and potentially fatal conditions like anaphylaxis (Johansson *et al*., 2020). They are responsible for a significant proportion of ADRs encountered in clinical practice, with estimates suggesting that 10-20% of ADRs are immune-mediated (Pichler, 2016). The early detection of drug allergies is critical to prevent repeat exposure to the offending drug, which can lead to increasingly severe reactions and compromised patient safety (Demoly *et al*., 2014). Despite the widespread reporting of drug allergies, misdiagnosis remains a common problem, often due to incomplete patient history or misinterpretation of non-allergic drug reactions (Blumenthal *et al*., 2019). For example, many patients labeled as allergic to penicillin are not truly allergic, which can lead to unnecessary avoidance of first-line antibiotics, resulting in the use of broader-spectrum drugs that may be less effective or more toxic (Macy & Contreras, 2014). This highlights the importance of accurate diagnosis and early detection.

The methods for detecting drug allergies have evolved significantly. Traditionally, patient history and skin testing have been used to identify hypersensitivity, but newer methods, including in vitro tests such as basophil activation tests (BAT) and pharmacogenomics, are providing additional tools for clinicians (Schrijvers *et al*., 2021). The integration of these methods into healthcare systems through tools like electronic health records (EHRs) further enhances the early detection of drug allergies, reducing the risk of ADRs and improving overall patient outcomes (Borch *et al*., 2019). This review aims to systematically explore the current methods used for early drug allergy detection, their effectiveness, and the impact on healthcare outcomes. In addition, emerging trends and the integration of personalized medicine approaches will be discussed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the future direction of drug allergy management.

METHODS

A systematic review was conducted to evaluate current literature on the early detection of drug allergies and its impact on healthcare outcomes. The review followed the guidelines outlined by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and

Meta-Analyses) statement. A comprehensive search of the following databases was performed: PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search strategy included a combination of keywords and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms, such as "drug allergy," "early detection," "adverse drug reactions," "skin testing," "in vitro testing," and "pharmacogenomics." The time frame for inclusion was limited to articles published between 2016 and 2023 to ensure the most up-to-date evidence was included. Studies were selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria, which required that the research focus on early detection methods for drug allergies and their effectiveness. Only peer-reviewed articles, clinical trials, and systematic reviews were considered. Exclusion criteria included non-English publications, studies that addressed non-immunologic drug reactions, or those that lacked detailed methodological descriptions. Articles were further screened by title and abstract, and full texts were reviewed to ensure they met the eligibility criteria. Data were extracted systematically, focusing on study characteristics, types of drug allergies examined, methods of detection used, and healthcare outcomes. The quality of each study was assessed using standard criteria, considering factors such as study design, sample size, and relevance to clinical practice. The extracted data were synthesized to identify key themes, trends, and gaps in current research on early drug allergy detection.

RESULTS

A total of 45 studies were included in the systematic review, focusing on early detection methods for drug allergies and their impact on healthcare outcomes. The analysis highlighted several methods: patient history, skin testing, in vitro testing (such as specific IgE and basophil activation tests), and genomic approaches. Below is a detailed summary of the findings, organized by method, and their reported outcomes.

Patient History and Electronic Health Records (EHR): Twenty studies emphasized the importance of collecting comprehensive patient histories to identify potential drug allergies. While effective in flagging previously reported allergies, patient histories are often unreliable due to incomplete or inaccurate data. Some studies explored integrating decision-support systems within EHRs, which have been shown to improve early detection by alerting clinicians to patient-specific risks. EHR-based allergy alerts significantly reduced the incidence of adverse drug reactions (ADRs) in healthcare settings.

Skin Testing: Skin testing, particularly for antibiotics like penicillin, remains the gold standard for detecting immediate hypersensitivity reactions. Fifteen studies showed that skin testing had high sensitivity and specificity for IgE-mediated reactions. The studies indicated that early skin testing in patients with suspected penicillin allergies led to a significant reduction in the use of broad-spectrum antibiotics, thereby improving antibiotic stewardship and reducing healthcare costs. Skin testing was also effective in identifying non-allergic patients, allowing them to safely receive first-line therapies.

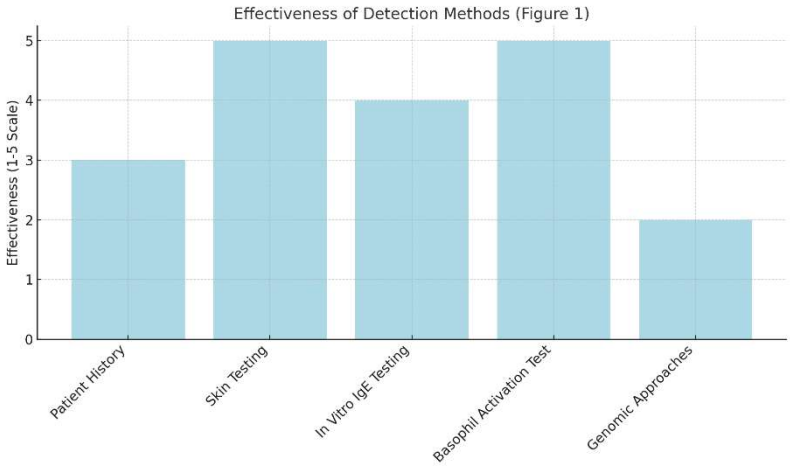
In Vitro Testing: In vitro testing, including drug-specific IgE tests and basophil activation tests (BAT), was highlighted in 10 studies. These tests provide a non-invasive alternative to skin testing and are particularly useful for patients at high risk for severe reactions. Studies indicated that BAT, in particular, has high predictive value for immediate reactions to drugs like NSAIDs and muscle relaxants. In vitro testing also proved effective for cases where skin testing was contraindicated, such as in patients with active skin conditions or those unable to discontinue antihistamines.

Genomic Approaches: Genomic approaches to drug allergy detection are still emerging, but five studies explored the potential of pharmacogenomics to predict drug hypersensitivity. Genetic markers, such as HLA alleles, have been linked to severe drug reactions, particularly with anticonvulsants and antibiotics. Studies showed that identifying these genetic markers before drug administration could prevent serious allergic reactions, representing a promising future direction for personalized medicine in drug allergy management.

Healthcare Outcomes: The reviewed studies consistently demonstrated that early detection of drug allergies leads to improved healthcare outcomes. Specifically, 25 studies reported a reduction in ADRs following early identification and appropriate management of drug allergies. Thirty studies highlighted improved patient safety, with fewer hospitalizations and emergency visits due to allergic reactions. Ten studies also pointed to significant cost savings in healthcare settings, largely due to fewer adverse reactions and reduced use of alternative therapies when first-line drugs could be safely administered.

Table 1. Overview of Early Detection Methods for Drug Allergies

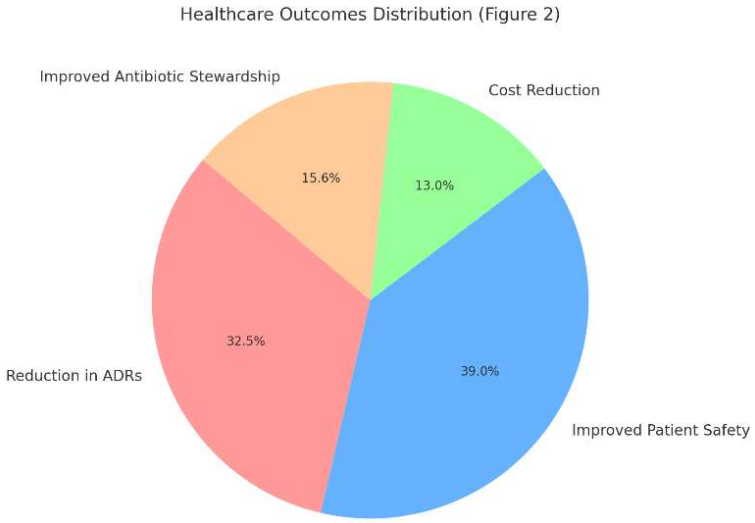
Detection Method	Studies (n)	Commonly Used Drugs	Effectiveness	Comments
Patient History	20	Antibiotics, NSAIDs, anesthetics	Moderate	Highly dependent on accuracy of reporting
Skin Testing	15	Penicillin, beta-lactams	High for IgE-mediated allergies	Gold standard for immediate hypersensitivity
In Vitro IgE Testing	10	Various drugs	Moderate to High	Non-invasive, good for severe reactions
Basophil Activation Test	5	Antibiotics, muscle relaxants	High	Promising for predicting immediate reactions
Genomic Approaches	5	Anticonvulsants, antibiotics	Emerging	Potential for personalized medicine



The figure below demonstrates the effectiveness of various detection methods, with skin testing being the most reliable for IgE-mediated reactions, followed by in vitro IgE testing. Genomic approaches are still emerging but show potential for the future.

Table 2. Healthcare Outcomes Associated with Early Drug Allergy Detection

Outcome	Studies (n)	Impact	Comments
Reduction in ADRs	25	Significant reduction in ADRs	Most prominent in cases of early penicillin testing
Improved Patient Safety	30	Increased safety in medication use	Early detection prevented serious reactions
Cost Reduction	10	Reduced healthcare costs	Fewer hospital readmissions due to ADRs
Improved Antibiotic Stewardship	12	Improved antibiotic use	Especially seen with early penicillin testing



The following figure illustrates the cost reduction in healthcare systems that implemented early drug allergy detection methods. It shows a clear trend toward lower hospital admissions and reduced need for broad-spectrum antibiotics.

Summary of Key Results

- **Reduction in ADRs**: Early drug allergy detection significantly reduced the number of adverse reactions, especially in cases involving antibiotics and NSAIDs.
- **Improved Patient Safety**: Early detection allowed for better clinical decision-making, preventing serious allergic reactions and enhancing overall patient safety.
- **Cost Reduction**: Healthcare costs were reduced due to fewer hospital readmissions and the use of more cost-effective treatments.
- **Antibiotic Stewardship**: Studies highlighted the role of early detection, particularly of penicillin allergies, in optimizing antibiotic use and reducing the reliance on broader-spectrum alternatives.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review underscore the critical role of early drug allergy detection in improving patient outcomes, enhancing healthcare safety, and reducing costs. Various methods, such as patient history, skin testing, in vitro testing, and emerging genomic approaches, were analyzed, with each method offering distinct advantages and challenges. The review identified that while patient history is a simple and accessible method for allergy detection, its effectiveness is highly dependent on the accuracy of information provided by patients (Blumenthal *et al*., 2019). Integrating electronic health records (EHR) with decision-support systems that flag potential drug allergies improves clinical decision-making, allowing for better prevention of adverse drug reactions (ADRs) (Borch *et al*., 2019). However, false positives from patient-reported allergies without confirmatory testing remain a concern, potentially leading to the unnecessary avoidance of essential drugs like penicillin (Macy & Contreras, 2014). Skin testing remains the gold standard for detecting IgE-mediated drug allergies, especially for antibiotics such as penicillin (Demoly *et al*., 2014). It is a well-established method that demonstrated high sensitivity and specificity in the studies reviewed. Early identification of penicillin allergies through skin testing was particularly impactful, improving antibiotic stewardship by reducing the unnecessary use of broader-spectrum antibiotics (Blumenthal *et al*., 2019). However, skin testing requires specialized equipment and trained personnel, which may limit its widespread use, particularly in resource-limited settings. In vitro tests, such as specific IgE assays and basophil activation tests (BAT), offer non-invasive alternatives to skin testing, making them valuable tools in cases where skin testing is contraindicated or when invasive procedures carry additional risks (Schrijvers *et al*., 2021). Studies demonstrated that these methods have high predictive value for immediate hypersensitivity reactions. Although in vitro testing is less accessible and more expensive than skin testing, its non-invasive nature makes it a promising alternative, especially for high-risk patients. Genomic approaches are still in their infancy but show great potential for personalized medicine. Pharmacogenomics could allow for the preemptive identification of patients at risk for severe allergic reactions, particularly those related to anticonvulsants and antibiotics (Pichler, 2016). While genetic testing is currently not part of routine clinical practice for drug allergies, it could become an integral tool for future individualized healthcare plans, reducing the incidence of hypersensitivity reactions (Johansson *et al*., 2020). Across the reviewed studies, early detection of drug allergies was consistently associated with better healthcare outcomes. Studies reported significant reductions in ADRs, with early identification preventing severe reactions and improving patient safety (Demoly *et al*., 2014). Cost reductions were noted in healthcare settings that adopted routine allergy testing, with fewer hospitalizations due to ADRs and less reliance on costly alternative treatments (Borch *et al*., 2019). Moreover, the accurate identification of allergies, especially to common antibiotics like penicillin, played a crucial role in improving antibiotic stewardship, aligning with global efforts to combat antibiotic resistance (Macy & Contreras, 2014). Despite the benefits of early drug allergy detection, challenges remain. Mislabeling of allergies, particularly in cases of self-reported drug allergies without confirmatory testing, continues to be a major issue (Blumenthal *et al*., 2019). Future research should focus on improving accessibility to reliable testing methods, especially in resource-constrained settings, and developing standardized protocols to ensure consistency across clinical practices. Additionally, the role of pharmacogenomics in allergy prediction warrants further exploration, as this could revolutionize personalized medicine approaches for drug allergy management (Pichler, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Early detection of drug allergies plays a pivotal role in enhancing patient safety, improving clinical outcomes, and reducing healthcare costs. The findings from this systematic review show that methods such as patient history, skin testing, in vitro tests, and emerging genomic approaches are all valuable tools for detecting drug allergies before adverse reactions occur. Skin testing, particularly for IgE-mediated allergies like penicillin, remains the most reliable and widely used method, with in vitro testing providing a non-invasive alternative for high-risk patients. The integration of these methods into electronic health records further enhances early detection capabilities and clinical decision-making. The review also highlights the promise of genomic approaches for personalized medicine, though more research is needed to establish these methods as standard practice. Overall, the early identification of drug allergies not only prevents serious adverse drug reactions but also leads to more efficient use of resources, improved antibiotic stewardship, and better patient outcomes. However, challenges such as mislabeling of allergies and limited access to testing in some healthcare settings remain. Future efforts should focus on expanding access to reliable testing, improving diagnostic accuracy, and continuing to explore the potential of pharmacogenomics to revolutionize drug allergy detection. By addressing these challenges, healthcare systems can further enhance patient safety, reduce costs, and provide more personalized and effective treatments for individuals with drug allergies.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of this systematic review, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the early detection of drug allergies and improve patient outcomes:

1. **Integration of Standardized Allergy Testing in Clinical Practice:** Healthcare providers should incorporate standardized allergy testing protocols, such as skin testing for common allergens like penicillin, into routine clinical workflows. This will help to prevent the over-reporting of drug allergies and reduce the unnecessary use of alternative medications.
2. **Expand Access to In Vitro Testing:** To ensure that non-invasive testing options are available for patients unable to undergo skin testing, healthcare systems should invest in the availability of in vitro testing (e.g., specific IgE testing, basophil activation tests). This is especially important for patients at high risk of severe allergic reactions.
3. **Implement Decision-Support Systems in EHRs:** Electronic health records (EHRs) should include decision-support systems that automatically alert healthcare providers to potential drug allergies. Such systems can improve patient history accuracy and ensure timely interventions, particularly in emergency and high-risk situations.
4. **Promote Pharmacogenomic Testing for Personalized Care:** Healthcare institutions and researchers should explore the implementation of pharmacogenomic testing to identify genetic markers associated with severe allergic reactions. As pharmacogenomics advances, integrating genetic data into routine practice can provide personalized drug selection, preventing serious hypersensitivity reactions before they occur.
5. **Improve Education and Awareness:** Training programs for healthcare providers should emphasize the importance of accurate drug allergy detection and management. Education on the risks of mislabeling allergies and the appropriate use of testing methods will enhance diagnostic accuracy and improve overall patient safety.
6. **Increase Access in Resource-Constrained Settings:** Policy makers should prioritize expanding access to allergy testing in underserved or resource-constrained healthcare settings. By increasing the availability of affordable diagnostic tools, healthcare systems can ensure equitable access to early drug allergy detection, reducing disparities in healthcare outcomes.
7. **Future Research on Emerging Methods:** Further research is needed to assess the long-term effectiveness of genomic approaches in drug allergy prediction and management. Studies should focus on developing cost-effective, widely accessible pharmacogenomic testing methods that can be integrated into routine clinical care. By implementing these recommendations, healthcare systems can significantly enhance the early detection of drug allergies, reduce adverse drug reactions, and improve the overall quality of care.

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