

**Minutes**  
**Task Force on Alpha Gal**  
**Monday, September 14, 2015**

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The Task Force on Alpha Gal met on Monday, September 14, 2015, at 1:30 p.m., in Room 130 of the State Capitol in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Committee members present: **Representatives** Julie Mayberry, Chair. Dr. James Bledsoe, Ms. Jane Chrisman, Dr. Dirk Haselow, Dr. Curtis Hedberg, Ms. Karen McCumpsey, Ms. Montine McNulty, Dr. Tina Merritt, Mr. Mark Riley, Mr. Wes Ward and Dr. Susan Weinstein.

Non Members: Zac Taylor and Mr. Scott Pace.

The meeting was called to order by Representative Mayberry.

**Adoption of Task Force Rules and Procedures [EXHIBIT D]**

Dr. Weinstein made a motion to adopt the Task Force Rules and Procedures, and Ms. McCumpsey seconded the motion. Without any objections the rules and procedures were adopted.

**Overview of Act 1247 of 2015 by which the Task Force on Alpha-Gal was created, Representative Julie Mayberry, Co-Sponsor, Act 1247 of 2015 [EXHIBIT E]**

Representative Mayberry briefly discussed Act 1247 of 2015.

**Presentation on the History of Alpha-Gal, Dr. Tina Merritt, Allergist-Immunologist, American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology [EXHIBIT F1- F2]**

Dr. Merritt provided a brief explanation prior to her presentation of the research behind Alpha-Gal as it relates to certain cancer drugs. After performing several tests, it was concluded that this drug, after taking one dose, had noticeable side effects, even some leading to a 2006 fatality in Bentonville, Arkansas. Some 22% of people in the mid-south regions experienced allergic reactions. Later in 2008 it was determined those patients had what is now known as Alpha-Gal. Alpha-Gal is short for sugar; a Galactose- alpha-1,3-galactose. This sugar is known to be found in mammals, but not humans. Tests were developed for study and tested positive for an allergy to Alpha-Gal. These allergies are not only found in red meats, but they are also found in some medications and vaccines.

Dr. Merritt referenced an article published in 2008 in the New England Journal of Medicine that talked about Alpha-Gal and the studies behind it. The presentation illustrated how ticks carry an infectious agent and has a strong relation to Alpha-Gal. Mammals exposed to infected ticks are known to transfer these allergies to humans upon contact. However, symptoms are not detected for weeks, even months later. In conclusion, there are thousands of people in the state of Arkansas who suffer from Alpha-Gal allergies. Symptoms include anaphylaxis, hives and swelling, some may experience severe stomach symptoms that can be life-threatening.

**Presentation on Common Concerns Regarding Alpha-Gal, Dr. Curtis Hedberg, Allergist-Immunologist, Hedberg Allergy and Asthma Center [EXHIBIT G]**

Dr. Hedberg pointed out some of the concerns he has relating to Alpha-Gal. In 1901, Charles Richet, a scientist, discovered Anaphylaxis. Some of his studies included injecting dogs with Coelentera and later discovering something was wrong. Anaphylaxis is a form of shock which involves more than one body system; such as the skin, respiratory tract, GI tract, and can also be life threatening. Food allergies account for 30,000 emergency room visits per year. Child related allergies account for 150-

200 deaths per year. Some reactions that occur during an anaphylaxis episode are:

- Cardiovascular events (heart and circulatory system)
- Drop in blood pressure (loss of consciousness; fainting)
- Respiratory tract
- Nose and eyes (watering & itching)
- Sneezing
- Swelling and itching
- Tingling of the mouth (swelling of throat)
- Nausea vomiting
- Hives (itchy rash)

To generalized allergic reactions:

- Insect stings – 3%; adults
- Food allergies – 1 to 3 percent; children
- Drugs – 1 percent; adults
- X-ray dye – 0 to 1 percent
- Allergy shots – 3 percent
- Latex (found in balloons as well toys) – 5 percent

Dr. Hedberg discussed the management of Anaphylaxis and teaching “awareness”. He mentioned two laws passed by the state of Arkansas; Alex’s Law (children are allowed to possess different types of asthma medications in school) and Act 704 (requires that schools have EpiPens). A lot of misinformation about allergies exists through social media; society needs to be properly educated.

About 20% of people who experience an allergic reaction are subject to a second reaction. The American College of Allergy and the American Academy of Allergy is working with emergency room physicians to help assist and educate them on the importance of treating allergy patients.

**Update on Alpha-Gal Research, Dr. Scott Commins, Associate Professor, University of North Carolina School of Medicine [EXHIBIT H]**

Dr. Commins addressed the committee via phone conference. He provided information on “*create an app day*”; where you are able to test patient serum and detect if they are allergic to certain cancer drugs. The sugar molecule, known for its connection to Alpha-Gal, is often found in cancer drugs. It was later determined that some patients with a high level of Immunoglobulin E (IgE, antibodies) for or allergic response to Alpha-Gal also tested positive for beef allergies. Some of the patients were asked to remove beef from their diets along with other things. Those that noticed an improvement in health began to feel much better. There were 24 patients from Virginia and Southern Missouri who reported delayed reactions after consuming beef, pork and/or lamb. Alpha-Gal not only affects adults, but it affects children and teenagers as well.

There are two different types of Alpha-Gal; (1) symptoms subside when beef and pork are removed from the diet, (2) extremely sensitive even with dietary restrictions. Dr. Commins and his team felt it was important to express the seriousness of food based reaction, often occurring within 3 to 6 hours after ingestion. He discussed a number of experiments with the lone star ticks and its association with

Alpha-Gal. He pointed out how allergies are being associated with vaccinations; one in particular is the Shingles vaccination, which has a very high level of gelatins. These reactions are not considered to be delayed reactions due to patients receiving injections and the reactions are occurring very quickly.

Dr. Commins provided a brief summary on management stating they really advocate an appropriate avoidance diet. He stated they are trying to be aggressive counseling the patients about getting bioprosthetic that are implantable and to remind them that the vaccines may not be about risk from an allergic standpoint as well. In conclusion, they are still gathering information on the delayed reactions and beginning to accumulate evidence. Some evidence relates reactions to fat absorption.

Representative Mayberry mentioned that she had contacted Food Allergy Resource Education (FARE) about the Alpha-Gal Task Force. One of the national issues is how EMS is trained in all areas and making sure they have EpiPens available. She noted this is one of the things that needs to be explored and making sure that EMS are equipped to handle these situations.

Representative Mayberry also made a recommendation that someone from the FDA attend one of the future task force meetings. She also recommended that Ms. McNulty, the Arkansas Hospitality Association, be a presenter at one of the meetings. She requested that more information be presented to stop the growth or control the tick population.

Mr. Rick Cartwright, Division of Agriculture, University of Arkansas, was recognized and stated the University has a tick expert on the faculty; Dr. Kelly Loften. He will request that Mr. Loften speak to the task force and share his experience in trying to manage and survey the tick population in the south.

Dr. Bledsoe stated he will review some of things EMS can do whenever encountered with Alpha-Gal patients.

Testimony was heard from different members of the public on allergy related experiences.

Next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Friday, November 20, 2015 at 10:00 a.m.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:23 p.m.