

Alert on aconitum alkaloid poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification of a confirmed case of aconitum alkaloid poisoning from Hospital Authority related to the consumption of the Chinese herbs, processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Processed Radix Aconiti, prescribed and purchased by a listed Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP) and a licensed retailer of Chinese herbal medicine in Tai Po respectively. The patient has been discharged after receiving treatment in a hospital. The suspected contributing factor for this poisoning event is overdose of processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Processed Radix Aconiti. Field investigation did not identify gross contamination of other Chinese herbs by aconitum alkaloids in the licensed retailer. According to the CMP's information, no other patient was prescribed with processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Processed Radix Aconiti recently.

Processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Processed Radix Aconiti are toxic Chinese herbs containing aconitum alkaloids and indicated for pain relief. Prolonged decoction to reduce their toxicity is required before they can be safely consumed orally. Their overdose can cause perioral and limb numbness, dizziness, nausea, diarrhea, weak pulses and shortness of breath. In severe cases, it may be fatal.

DH advises CMPs to draw reference to relevant herbal standards in their prescription. Members of the public are also advised to follow CMP's instructions in the preparation and consumption of Chinese herbs. They should seek medical advice as soon as possible if there is any discomfort after taking herbal medicines.

The case has been referred to the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong for consideration of disciplinary action to the CMP.

Chinese Medicine Division,
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