

Alert on Chinese herbal medicine poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received a notification from the Hospital Authority of a confirmed case of poisoning related to the consumption of self-prescribed Chinese herbs. The patient was subsequently admitted to a local public hospital due to dizziness, neck stiffness, and limb numbness. Strychnine and brucine were detected in patient's urine sample. The patient was then discharged uneventfully. Investigations revealed that the patient's husband had purchased the herbs from unknown sources in Hong Kong. The Chinese herbal medicine, processed Semen Strychni, could be identified from unused herbs and excessive dosage was shown on formula, which therefore is a likely cause of the poisoning.

Processed Semen Strychni is a Chinese herb which is indicated for pain and swelling relief. Intoxication may be caused by overdose, and the symptoms include headache, dizziness, agitation, shortness of breath and muscle spasm. In severe cases, affected patient may have convulsion, asphyxiation or even death.

Members of the public are advised to consult qualified Chinese medicine practitioners should they wish to take Chinese herbs, and avoid self prescription. Besides, people should purchase Chinese medicines from credible sources.

Please refer to these links for more health information on toxic Chinese herbal medicines and preparation of herbal decoctions:

http://www.cmchk.org.hk/pdf/rp_pdh10_e.pdf

http://www.cmchk.org.hk/pdf/rp_pdh08_e.pdf

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