

Alert on Aconitum Alkaloid Poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification of a confirmed case of aconitum alkaloid poisoning from the Hospital Authority related to consumption of two Chinese herbs, processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Processed Radix Aconiti, prescribed and prepared by a registered Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP) in Tsuen Wan. The patient is now in stable condition after receiving treatment in a hospital. The suspected contributing factors for this poisoning event are inappropriate consumption of the herbal broth against the CMP's instruction and overdose of processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Processed Radix Aconiti. Field investigation did not identify gross contamination of other Chinese herbs by aconitum alkaloid-containing herbs in the licensed Chinese herbal medicine retailer where the CMP stationed. According to the CMP's information, no other patient prescribed with processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Processed Radix Aconiti suffered from adverse symptoms 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 oral consumption. Overdose of these herbs can cause perioral and limb numbness, dizziness, nausea, diarrhoea, weak pulses and shortness of breath. It can be fatal in severe case.

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.

DH has referred this case to the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong for consideration of disciplinary action against the CMP.

Chinese Medicine Division,
Department of Health
15 March 2013