

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 processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis, prescribed by a registered Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP) in Sham Shui Po. The patient has recovered after receiving treatment and has been discharged from the hospital. The suspected contributing factor for this poisoning event is overdose of processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis. 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 practised. According to the CMP's information, no other patient prescribed with processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis suffered from adverse symptoms recently.

Processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis is a toxic Chinese herb containing aconitum alkaloids and indicated for pain relief. Prolonged decoction to reduce its toxicity is required before oral consumption. If used improperly, aconitum alkaloids 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 will refer this case to the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong for consideration of taking disciplinary action against the CMP.

Chinese Medicine Division
Department of Health
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