

Alert on herbal medicine poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received a notification from the Hospital Authority (HA) of a confirmed case of aconitum alkaloid poisoning. The case involved a 32-year-old patient who had consumed herbal broth containing Chinese herbal medicines (Chm), namely processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis*, prepared by his family member. The patient developed symptoms including numbness, dizziness, abdominal pain and diarrhea. The patient was then admitted to a public hospital for treatment and was subsequently discharged. HA's laboratory results revealed that aconitum alkaloids were present in the patient's urine sample. This poisoning case is suspected to be related to consumption of Chm without instruction of Chinese medicine practitioner and inadequate decoction of Chm.

Processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis* is listed in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap.549). It is commonly used for pain relief. It contains aconitum alkaloids and can cause perioral and limbs numbness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, weak pulses and shortness of breath if used improperly. It can be fatal in severe case. Therefore, prolonged decoction to reduce its toxicity is required before oral consumption.

DH advises members of the public not to self-prescribe Chinese medicines. Those who are feeling unwell should consult Chinese medicine practitioner before taking Chinese medicines. Medical advice should be sought if there is any discomfort after consumption.

Members of the public may visit the website of Chinese Medicine Division of DH (http://www.cmd.gov.hk/html/eng/health_info/pamphlet.html) for information about safe use of Chinese medicines.

Chinese Medicine Division
Department of Health
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