

Alert on herbal medicine poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) recently received notification of a confirmed case of aconitum alkaloid poisoning from the Hospital Authority (HA). The patient might have mistakenly added Radix Aconiti Lateralis stock in the her home into the soup she cooked. She developed symptoms including limbs and tongue numbness, vomiting and diarrhoea after drinking the soup. The patient was admitted to a public hospital for treatment and was discharged later. Laboratory results from HA revealed that there were aconitum alkaloids in the patient's urine sample and remnant of soup ingredients. The Radix Aconiti Lateralis stock in the patient's home was bought by the patient herself and was not prescribed by a Chinese medicine practitioner. The suspected contributing factor for this poisoning event is the improper use of Radix Aconiti Lateralis.

Unprocessed and processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis and Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii are listed in the Schedule 1 and 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap 549) respectively, which contain aconitum alkaloids. Unprocessed Radix Aconiti Lateralis is usually for external application instead of oral intake. If used improperly, aconitum alkaloids can cause perioral and limbs numbness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, weak pulses and shortness of breath. It can be fatal in severe case.

Members of the public are advised not to self-prescribe Chinese medicines. Besides, purchasing Chinese medicines from licensed retailers ensures that the herbal medicines come from reputable suppliers. Members of the public 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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