

Alert on herbal medicine poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification of a case of aconitum alkaloids poisoning from the Hospital Authority. The affected male patient purchased some Chinese medicines from a local store according to a herbal wine formula of unknown origin. He prepared the herbal wine by soaking the Chinese medicines in some Chinese spirit. He developed symptoms including general and oral numbness, dizziness and palpitation 30 minutes after consumption of the herbal wine. He was admitted to a public hospital for treatment and subsequently discharged. The suspected contributing factor for this poisoning event is consumption of Chinese medicines without instruction of Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP).

Common Chinese herbal medicines (Chm) that contain aconitum alkaloids include *Radix Aconiti*, *Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii* and *Radix Aconiti Lateralis*. The unprocessed and processed forms of the mentioned Chm are controlled under the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap 549) as listed in its Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 respectively. Improper use of Chm containing 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.

DH reminds members of the public do not self-prescribe Chinese medicines or buy them from unknown sources. The use of Chinese medicine should be based on one's constitution and the course of their illness. The benefits of Chinese medicine would be maximized by its proper use. Therefore, the public should consult CMP before taking Chinese medicines and to purchase them from licensed retailers. Medical advice should be sought if there is any discomfort after consumption.

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

Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office

Department of Health

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