

Alert on herbal medicine poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification of a confirmed case of aconitum alkaloid poisoning from the Hospital Authority (HA). The affected female patient decocted and consumed Chinese herbal medicines (Chm), including processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis*, purchased locally based on an herbal formula downloaded from the internet and without consulting a Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP). The patient developed numbness over her face, oral cavity and four limbs after consumption of the Chm. She was admitted to a public hospital for treatment and subsequently discharged. Laboratory results from HA showed aconitum alkaloids in her urine. The suspected contributing factor for this poisoning event is consumption of Chinese medicines without instruction from CMP and overdose.

Processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis* is listed in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap. 549). It is commonly used for pain relief, but contains aconitum alkaloids. If used improperly, aconitum alkaloids can cause perioral and limb numbness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, weak pulses and shortness of breath. It can be fatal in severe cases. Pre-decoction and prolonged decoction are essential to reduce its toxicity before consumption.

DH reminds members of the public not to self-prescribe Chinese medicines but should consult a CMP before taking them. 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/useful_information/public_health/index.html) for information about safe use of Chinese medicines.

Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office
Department of Health
16 August 2021