

Alert on misuse of Chinese medicine

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification of a case of Chinese medicine misuse from the Hospital Authority (HA). Without consulting a Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP), the affected female patient purchased the Chinese herbal medicine (Chm) Semen Abri Precatorii from the internet for consumption. She was admitted to a public hospital for treatment. Laboratory results from HA showed abrine in her urine. The suspected contributing factor for this event of misuse was consumption of Chinese medicines without instruction from CMP.

Semen Abri Precatorii is listed in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap. 549). It contains the toxalbumin abrin. It is commonly used externally for skin diseases but should not be ingested. Improper use could lead to loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, blood in urine, circulatory failure and even death due to difficulty in breathing.

DH reminds members of the public to consult a CMP before taking Chinese medicines, and to follow their instructions on decoction and consumption regime. The public should not self-prescribe Chinese medicines, nor be credulous about formulae told by others. Chinese medicines should be purchased from licensed Chinese herbal medicine retailers to minimise the risk of acquiring herbal medicines that are improperly processed. 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
2 May 2023