

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 (HA). According to the information gathered, the affected patient purchased Chinese herbal medicines (Chm), including processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis* for consumption without consulting a Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP). The patient developed palpitation, vomiting, diarrhea and dizziness after consumption of the Chm. The patient was admitted to a public hospital for treatment. Laboratory results from HA showed aconitum alkaloids in the urine of the patient. It was suspected that this poisoning event was related to consumption of Chm without following the instruction from a CMP and overdose of processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis*.

Processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis* is a Chm 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 to consult a CMP before taking Chinese medicines, and to follow their instructions on decoction and consumption regime. One should not self-prescribe Chinese medicines, nor be credulous about formulae told by others. Chinese medicines should be purchased from licensed Chm 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 more information about safe use of Chinese medicines.

Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office

Department of Health

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