

Alert on herbal medicine poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification of a case of solanaceous poisoning from the Hospital Authority (HA). According to the information gathered, the case involves two patients from the same household. The two affected patients, without consulting a Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP), purchased Chinese herbal medicines (Chms) including claimed Ru Di Lao Shu (Radix Mirabilis) from the internet, and then self-prepared soup containing “Radix Mirabilis” for consumption. The two patients developed symptoms such as confusion, tachycardia and dilated pupils after consumption of the soup. The patients were admitted to a public hospital for treatments and were subsequently discharged. Laboratory results from HA and the Government Laboratory revealed that both the urine samples of the patients and the sample of Chm claimed to be Radix Mirabilis contained solanaceous alkaloids respectively. Examination from DH identified that the Chm sample was not Radix Mirabilis. It was suspected that this poisoning event was related to the consumption of Chm contaminated with Solanaceous alkaloids.

Radix Mirabilis is a Chm in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap. 549). According to the Chinese medicine literature, the concerned Chm could not account for the presence of the solanaceous alkaloids detected. Solanaceous alkaloids cause anticholinergic symptoms including blurred vision, dry mouth, dizziness and confusion. Deaths may result in severe cases.

DH reminds members of the public to consult a CMP before taking Chinese medicines, and to follow their instructions on preparation and consumption. One should not self-prescribe Chinese medicines, nor be credulous about formulae told by others. Members of the public should also purchase Chm from licensed Chm retailers to minimise the risk of acquiring herbal medicines that may be adulterated or contaminated. Medical advice should be sought as soon as possible 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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