

Alert on herbal medicine poisoning: Don't consume Chinese medicines from unknown sources

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification of a case in relation to aconitum alkaloids poisoning from the Hospital Authority (HA). According to the information gathered, the affected patient consumed Chinese medicine powder obtained from his friend, without consulting a Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP). The ingredients of the Chinese medicine powder were not labelled. The patient developed dizziness, chest pain, loss of consciousness and cardiac arrhythmias after consumption of the Chinese medicine powder. He was admitted to a public hospital for treatment and was subsequently discharged. Laboratory results from HA showed aconitum alkaloids in his urine. Consuming Chinese medicine from unknown source containing aconitum alkaloids could contribute to this suspected poisoning.

Chinese medicines containing aconitum alkaloids, such as Radix Aconiti, Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Radix Aconiti Lateralis, are usually used in treating musculoskeletal disorders, painful conditions, etc. Improper use of Chinese medicines containing aconitum alkaloids can cause adverse effects including numbness of the mouth and limbs, nausea and vomiting, and can even lead to life-threatening conditions like breathing distress and cardiac arrhythmia etc. It can be fatal in severe cases.

DH reminds members of the public to consult a CMP before taking Chinese medicines, and follow the instruction of the CMP to take Chinese medicines. Member of the public should not purchase or consume Chinese medicines of unknown source. 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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