

Alert on Aconitum Alkaloid Poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has received notification of a confirmed case of aconitum alkaloid poisoning from the Hospital Authority related to consumption of the Chinese herbal medicine, Bai Fu Pian. The patient was discharged after hospital treatment.

Investigations revealed that Bai Fu Pian was prescribed by a registered Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP) and dispensed by a licensed retailer of Chinese herbal medicine in Tin Hau. Field investigation did not identify abnormalities at the licensed Chinese herbal medicine retailer. So far no other related adverse reports were received by DH.

The contributing factors for this poisoning event could be related to excessive consumption of Bai Fu Pian or inadequate decoction of the herb against the CMP's instruction.

Bai Fu Pian is a kind of processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis, which is listed in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap.549). It is used for pain relief. Bai Fu Pian contains toxic aconitum alkaloids. If used improperly, aconitum alkaloids can cause numbness of the mouth and limbs, nausea, vomiting and peripheral weakness, even life-threatening breathing difficulties and cardiac arrhythmia. Therefore, prolonged decoction to reduce its toxicity is required before oral consumption.

DH advises CMPs to draw reference to relevant pharmacopoeial standards in their prescription of Chinese herbal medicines. Members of the public are also advised to follow CMP's instructions in the preparation and consumption of Chinese herbs. They should seek medical advice as soon as possible if there is any discomfort after taking herbal medicines.

Chinese Medicine Division
Department of Health
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