

Alert on Aconitum Alkaloid Poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification of a confirmed case of aconitum alkaloid poisoning from the Hospital Authority related to consumption of two Chinese herbs, processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and processed Radix Aconiti, prescribed by a registered Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP) in Kowloon Tong. The patient has recovered after receiving treatment and has been discharged from the hospital. The suspected contributing factor for this poisoning event is overdose of processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and processed Radix Aconiti. According to the CMP's information, no other patient prescribed with the two Chinese herbal medicines suffered from adverse symptoms recently.

Processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and processed Radix Aconiti are toxic Chinese herbs containing aconitum alkaloids and indicated for pain relief. Prolonged decoction to reduce their toxicity is required before oral consumption. If used improperly, aconitum alkaloids can cause perioral and limb numbness, dizziness, nausea, diarrhoea, weak pulses and shortness of breath. It can be fatal in severe case.

DH advises CMPs to draw reference to relevant herbal standards in their prescription. Particular care should be taken when CMPs prescribe toxic Chinese herbs. Their doses, combination and decoction should be tailored to patients' clinical status and based on relevant literature. 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.

DH will refer this case to the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong to follow up whether there is inappropriate practice of the CMP.

Chinese Medicine Division Department of Health
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