

## **Alert on herbal medicine poisoning**

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification of a confirmed case of aconitum alkaloid poisoning from the Hospital Authority (HA). The patient had self-prescribed Chinese medicines, unprocessed Radix Aconiti Lateralis according to a herbal formula obtained from the internet. The herbs were purchased in the Mainland and the decoction was prepared by the patient. The patient developed perioral and limbs numbness after consumption and was admitted to a public hospital for treatment. He was discharged on the following day. The HA's laboratory testing results showed the presence of aconitum alkaloids in the patient's urine sample. The suspected contributing factors for this poisoning event are inappropriate self-prescription of Chinese medicines with overdose of unprocessed Radix Aconiti Lateralis.

Unprocessed Radix Aconiti Lateralis is a toxic Chinese herb containing aconitum alkaloids and indicated for pain relief. It should be used externally in general. Otherwise prolonged decoction to reduce its toxicity is required before oral consumption. If used improperly, aconitum alkaloids can cause perioral and limb numbness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, weak pulses and shortness of breath. It can be fatal in severe case.

DH advises members of the public not to recklessly purchase Chinese medicines. People should consult reputable and qualified CMPs for any illness and purchase Chinese medicines from reliable retailers. They should seek health advice as soon as possible if there is any discomfort after taking herbal medicines.

Chinese Medicine Division

Department of Health

5 March 2014