

Alert on herbal medicine poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) received notification of a confirmed case of aconitum alkaloid poisoning from the Hospital Authority (HA). Without Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP)'s consultation, the patient bought Chinese medicines in a herbal shop in the Mainland China and prepared decoction of the Chinese medicines by himself. The patient developed symptoms including perioral numbness, vomiting and diarrhoea shortly after consumption of the herbal broth. Then the patient was admitted to a public hospital for treatment and was subsequently discharged. Laboratory results from HA showed aconitum alkaloids in the patient's urine sample and herbal remnant. Upon investigation, the Department of Health identified that the unused Chinese medicines was processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis. The possible contributing factors for this poisoning event are consumption of processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis without instruction of CMP.

Processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis is listed in the Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap 549). It is commonly used for pain relief, but contains aconitum alkaloids. If used improperly, aconitum alkaloids can cause perioral and limbs numbness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, weak pulses and shortness of breath. It can be fatal in severe case. Therefore, prolonged decoction to reduce its toxicity is required before oral consumption.

Members of the public are also advised not to self-prescribe Chinese medicines. Those who are feeling unwell should consult Chinese medicine practitioner before taking Chinese medicines. Medical advice should be sought if there is any discomfort after consumption.

Members of the public may visit the website of Chinese Medicine Division of DH (http://www.cmd.gov.hk/html/eng/health_info/pamphlet.html) for information about safe use of Chinese medicines.

Chinese Medicine Division
Department of Health
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