

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). Without Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP)'s consultation, the patient purchased Chinese herbal medicines (Chm), including processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis*, in licensed retailers of Chinese herbal medicines and decocted the Chinese medicine herself. The patient developed symptoms including vomiting and numbness of four limbs after consumption of the Chm. 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. The suspected contributing factor for this poisoning event is consumption of Chinese medicines without instruction of CMP.

Processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis* is listed in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap 549). It is commonly used for pain relief, but contain 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.

DH advises members of the public 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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