

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 consulted a Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP) and was prescribed with three doses of Chinese herbal medicines (Chm). The patient prepared the Chm without following the decoction method recommended by the CMP. The patient developed symptoms including limbs numbness, dizziness and vomiting 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 and herbal remnant samples. Field investigation did not identify gross contamination of related Chinese medicines with aconitum alkaloid. The suspected contributing factors for this poisoning event are preparing the Chm without following the decoction method recommended by CMP and inadequate decoction of processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis*.

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 of processed *Radix Aconiti Lateralis* to reduce its toxicity is required before oral consumption.

Members of the public who are feeling unwell should consult Chinese medicine practitioner and follow his advice 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

13 October 2016