

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 consumed self-prescribed Chinese herbal medicines (Chm), namely processed Radix Aconiti and processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii, and developed symptoms compatible with aconitum alkaloid poisoning. The patient was then admitted to a public hospital for treatment and is currently in stable condition. Laboratory results from HA showed aconitum alkaloids were present in the patient's urine sample. The suspected contributing factors of this poisoning event are self-prescription, consumption with overdose of processed Radix Aconiti and processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii, and inappropriate preparation of Chm.

Processed Radix Aconiti and processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii are listed in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap.549). They are 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. Members of the public are advised to consult reputable and qualified Chinese medicine practitioners. They should seek medical advice as soon as possible if there is any discomfort after taking Chm.

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

17 April 2015