

Alert on herbal medicine poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) has recently received notification from the Hospital Authority (HA) of a confirmed case of Chinese herbal medicine (Chm) related poisoning. The case involved a 62-year-old patient who had accidentally consumed self-picked and dried “Radix Gelsemii Elegantis”, from the Mainland and developed poisoning symptoms such as dizziness, weakness and breathing difficulty etc. The patient was then admitted to a public hospital for treatment and was subsequently discharged with acknowledgement of medical advice. HA’s laboratory results revealed that gelsemium alkaloids were present in the patient’s urine and herbal broth samples. This poisoning case is suspected to be related to consumption of Chm without instruction of Chinese medicine practitioner.

Radix Gelsemii Elegantis is a Chinese herbal medicine listed in the Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap.549). It is mainly used externally to relieve pain or reduce skin bruises. It contains gelsemium alkaloids and can cause dizziness, blurring of vision, mydriasis, severe abdominal pain, muscle weakness and respiratory arrest, if used improperly. It can be fatal in severe case.

DH advises members of the public to consult reputable and qualified Chinese medicine practitioners if they feel unwell. They are also reminded to refrain from picking up or self-processing plants for consumption from countryside, as many of which might contain lethal natural toxins. Medical advice should also 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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