

### **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 medicines in a licensed Chinese herbal medicines (Chm) retailer and consumed the herbal broth according to a prescription previously issued by a CMP. The patient developed symptoms including tongue and limbs numbness, vomiting, breathing difficulty and chest discomfort 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 inadequate decoction as well as consumption of overdose processed *Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii*.

Processed *Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii* 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 CMPs to make reference to relevant recommendations on usage and dosage when they prescribe Chm. Their doses, combination and decoction should be tailored to patients' clinical status and based on relevant literatures. 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](http://www.cmd.gov.hk/html/eng/health_info/pamphlet.html)) for information about safe use of Chinese medicines.

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