

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-prepared Chinese medicines, processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis, and an hour later, developed perioral and four limbs numbness, dizziness and nausea. He was admitted to a public hospital for treatment and was subsequently discharged. Laboratory results from the HA showed aconitum alkaloids in the patient's urine sample.

Processed Radix Aconiti Lateralis is listed in Schedule 2 of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap.549). It is commonly used for pain relief, but contains 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 to consult reputable and qualified Chinese medicine practitioners and purchase Chinese medicines from reliable retailers. People should not recklessly purchase or self-prescribe Chinese medicines for any illness. To protect your health, never purchase or consume any Chinese medicines from unknown sources.

DH has produced pamphlets on safe use of Chinese medicines for public education. Member of the public may visit the website of the Chinese Medicine Division (http://cmd.gov.hk/html/eng/health_info/pamphlet.html) for more health information.

Chinese Medicine Division,
Department of Health
25 April 2014