

CHP investigates suspected case of paralytic shellfish poisoning

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (December 25) investigating a suspected case of paralytic shellfish poisoning affecting a 69-year-old woman.

The patient presented with numbness of mouth and limbs as well as vomiting and diarrhoea 30 minutes after consuming mussels at home yesterday (December 24). She attended the Accident and Emergency Department of Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital on the same day and was subsequently admitted for treatment. The patient has been in a stable condition.

Initial enquiries revealed that the concerned seafood were purchased from a seafood stall in Chai Wan Market. An investigation by the CHP is continuing.

"Paralytic shellfish poisoning toxin is a natural toxin sometimes found in bivalve shellfish. It is heat-stable and cannot be destroyed through cooking," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"The symptoms of paralytic shellfish poisoning are predominantly neurological and the onset is usually within minutes to hours after ingestion of the shellfish. Initial symptoms may include tingling, numbness of the mouth and extremities, a headache, dizziness and gastrointestinal discomfort. In the majority of cases, symptoms are resolved completely within a few days. In severe cases, difficulty in swallowing and speech, paralysis with respiratory arrest and even death may occur," the spokesman added.

The spokesman reminded members of the public that they should seek medical advice immediately if they develop shellfish poisoning symptoms, and save any leftovers for investigation and laboratory testing.

To reduce the risk of shellfish poisoning, the public should:

- Buy shellfish from reliable and licensed seafood shops;
- Remove the viscera, gonads and roe before cooking and discard any cooking liquid before consumption;
- Eat a smaller amount of shellfish in any one meal; and
- When symptoms occur after consuming shellfish, seek medical advice immediately.