

CHP investigates suspected poisoning case after consumption of wine containing taxus

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) is today (April 16) investigating a suspected poisoning case after consumption of self-prepared wine containing taxus, and appealed to members of the public to be cautious of the risk of poisoning from consumption of taxus-containing substances.

Upon notification by the Hospital Authority, the CHP immediately commenced epidemiological investigation. The case involves a 57-year-old man with good past health who developed muscle pain, lower limbs weakness and numbness 30 minutes after consumption of wine containing taxus on April 14. He sought medical attention at the Accident and Emergency Department of Ruttonjee Hospital on the same day and was admitted. He was subsequently transferred to the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital last night for further management. He is now in a serious condition. The clinical specimen of the patient and the remnants of the wine have been sent to a laboratory for analysis and the result is pending.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the patient consumed the wine containing taxus with three friends, who remain asymptomatic so far. The wine was self-prepared by one of his friends a few years ago using taxus obtained in the Mainland. Investigation is still continuing.

"Taxus is a genus of toxic tree known as yew. All species of yew contain highly poisonous taxine alkaloids. Severe poisoning after consumption of yew has also been reported in literature. Patients may first present with gastrointestinal symptoms, and onset of other symptoms such as muscle weakness generally occurs within three to four hours after consumption. In severe cases, tachycardia followed by bradycardia, hypotension, respiratory depression, convulsions and coma will occur. Death may also result in severe cases. At present, there is no specific antidote," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"Members of the public should not self-make and consume food or drinks containing taxus or unknown plants to avoid poisoning. If poisoning related to the consumption of related food or drink is suspected, the patient should seek immediate medical attention," the spokesman advised.