

CHP appeals to public to take precautionary measures against carbon monoxide poisoning

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (February 20) appealed to members of the public to take precautionary measures against carbon monoxide poisoning.

The CHP received a notification from United Christian Hospital (UCH) yesterday (February 19) on a cluster of carbon monoxide poisoning. The cluster involved a 23-year-old man and a 21-year-old woman, who complained of loss of consciousness after visiting a premises with people smoking waterpipe yesterday. They were sent to UCH and were later transferred to Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital for treatment. They are in stable condition and have been discharged.

A preliminary investigation revealed that charcoal fuel was claimed to be used for smoking waterpipe in the premises when the door and windows were shut with air-conditioning switched on.

A spokesman for the CHP reminded that carbon monoxide is a colourless, odourless and tasteless gas which is a by-product from incomplete combustion of any fuel which contains carbon, such as charcoals and embers. Members of the public are urged to use fuel-burning appliances properly and in a well-ventilated area.

Exposure to a low concentration of carbon monoxide can lead to a range of symptoms such as dizziness, headache, tiredness and nausea; whereas exposure to a high concentration of carbon monoxide can lead to impaired vision, disturbed co-ordination, unconsciousness, brain damage or even death. People should seek medical attention immediately if suspected of developing symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Also, waterpipe is a smoking product and its combustion of fuel (e.g. charcoal) releases high concentrations of carbon monoxide. Due to deeper inhalation and longer smoking session, waterpipe users usually inhale more toxins than they would when smoking cigarettes. A typical one-hour waterpipe smoking session exposes the user to 100-200 times the volume of smoke inhaled from a single conventional cigarette. Besides, sharing the waterpipe apparatus increases the risk of infectious disease transmission such as tuberculosis. The DH urges people not to smoke waterpipe. Furthermore, smoking is the major preventable cause of death. Members of the public is urged to quit smoking now for health's sake. For more information, they can call the DH's Integrated Smoking Cessation Hotline at 1833 183, or visit the thematic webpage (www.livetobaccofree.hk/en).