

CHP investigates case of mad honey poisoning

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (November 13) investigating a case of mad honey poisoning, and reminded the public to buy honey from a reliable source or apiary.

The 65-year-old female patient developed vomiting, confusion, hypotension and bradycardia around one hour after consuming honey yesterday (November 12). She was taken to the Accident and Emergency Department of Queen Elizabeth Hospital on the same day and was admitted for treatment. The patient is in stable condition and is still hospitalised. Her clinical diagnosis was mad honey poisoning.

Initial enquiries revealed that the patient consumed home-made honey brought to Hong Kong by a friend from India. The poisoning might have been caused by grayanotoxin. Investigations are ongoing.

"Mad honey poisoning is caused by ingestion of honey containing grayanotoxins derived from plants belonging to the Ericaceae family, including rhododendrons. Grayanotoxins are neurotoxins which can affect nerves and muscles. Symptoms of poisoning include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, dizziness, weakness, excessive perspiration, hypersalivation and paraesthesia shortly after ingestion. In severe cases, hypotension, bradycardia or shock may occur," a spokesman for the CHP explained.

Members of the public are reminded to take heed of the following preventive advice:

- Buy honey from a reliable source or apiary;
- Discard honey with a bitter or astringent taste – grayanotoxin-containing honey may cause a burning sensation in the throat; and
- Pay special attention to honey from India, Nepal and the Black Sea region of Türkiye as there have been grayanotoxin poisoning cases connected with honey from these areas.