

CHP investigates case of suspected neurotoxic shellfish poisoning

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (August 21) investigating a case of suspected neurotoxic shellfish poisoning affecting two patients.

The case involves a 42-year-old female and a 45-year-old male, who presented with tingling of the tongue, vomiting and diarrhoea a few minutes to three hours after consuming steamed snails at home together yesterday afternoon (August 20). They attended Tseung Kwan O Hospital on the same day and did not require hospitalisation. Both patients have been in stable condition all along.

An initial investigation revealed that the snails were bought from a seafood stall at Ap Lei Chau Market. Investigations by the CHP and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department are continuing.

"Neurotoxic 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 neurotoxic shellfish poisoning symptoms include tingling of the lips, mouth and tongue, as well as gastrointestinal upset such as diarrhoea and vomiting. The onset of is usually within a few minutes to a few hours after ingestion of the shellfish," the spokesman added.

The spokesman reminded members of the public that they should seek medical advice immediately if they develop neurotoxic 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.