

CHP investigates suspected case of paralytic shellfish poisoning

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (June 12) investigating a suspected case of paralytic shellfish poisoning affecting a 68-year-old man.

The patient, who presented with perioral and limb numbness, vomiting and diarrhoea 10 minutes after consuming whelks at home yesterday (June 11). The patient is in stable condition and does not require hospitalisation.

Initial enquiries revealed that the whelks were purchased from a fish stall in the Aberdeen Wholesale Fish Market. Investigations by the CHP and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department are 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, headache, dizziness and gastrointestinal discomfort. In the majority of cases, symptoms resolve 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.