

CHP investigates suspected case of paralytic shellfish poisoning

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (June 19) investigating a suspected case of paralytic shellfish poisoning affecting two members of a family.

The case involves two males aged 51 and 20 respectively, who presented with breathing difficulties, dizziness, slurring of speech, numbness of lower extremities, vomiting and diarrhoea within 3 to 3.5 hours after consuming goose barnacles at home yesterday (June 18). One of the patients attended the Accident and Emergency Department of Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital in the small hours today and was subsequently admitted for treatment. The patients have been in a stable condition.

Initial enquiries revealed that the concerned seafood were purchased from a seafood stall in Yue Wan Market in Chai Wan. An investigation by the CHP is 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, a headache, dizziness and gastrointestinal discomfort. In the majority of cases, symptoms are resolved 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.