

CHP investigates suspected ciguatoxin food poisoning case

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (July 20) investigating a suspected ciguatoxin food poisoning case, and hence reminded the public to eat less coral reef fish to reduce the risk of poisoning.

The affected 66-year-old man developed nausea and oral numbness about 1.5 hours after consuming fish for dinner at home last Friday (July 17). The patient did not seek medical treatment and is in a stable condition.

Initial enquiries revealed that the fish consumed was bought from Sau Mau Ping Market in Kwun Tong last Friday.

"We have informed the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department of the incident and investigations are ongoing," a spokesman for the CHP said.

Ciguatera fish poisoning is not uncommon in tropical areas. It is mainly associated with the consumption of big coral reef fish which have accumulated the toxin in the body, particularly in internal organs, through eating small fish that consumed toxic algae in coral reef seas.

A larger fish is therefore more likely to carry higher amounts of the toxin. However, it is not easy to tell from the appearance of the fish whether it contains the toxin.

People affected may show symptoms of numbness of the mouth and limbs, vomiting, diarrhoea, alternating sensations of coldness and hotness, and pain in the joints and muscles.

"Most people affected by ciguatoxin will recover without long-term health effects, but if excessive toxins are consumed, the circulatory and nervous systems can be affected. The toxin cannot be destroyed by cooking," the spokesman said.

To prevent ciguatera fish poisoning, the public should:

- Eat less coral reef fish;
- Eat small amounts of coral reef fish at any meal and avoid having a whole fish feast in which all dishes come from the same big coral reef fish;
- Avoid eating the head, skin, intestines and roe of coral reef fish, which usually have a higher concentration of toxins;
- When eating coral reef fish, avoid consuming alcohol, peanuts or beans as they may aggravate ciguatoxin poisoning;
- Seek medical treatment immediately should symptoms of ciguatoxin fish

poisoning appear; and

- Coral reef fish should be purchased from reputable and licensed seafood shops. Do not buy the fish when the source is doubtful.