

CHP investigates suspected poisoning case after consumption of medicinal plant

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 8) announced that it is investigating a suspected case of poisoning related to consumption of medicinal plant, and urged members of the public not to collect or consume any unknown plants from parks or the countryside as they may be poisonous.

The case involving a 46-year-old woman who developed dizziness, facial numbness and blurred vision after taking self-prepared broth containing a medicinal plant, *Cassytha Filiformis*, that she collected while hiking in Cloudy Hill, Tai Po in late April. A friend of the patient who went hiking with her also picked the plant and self-prepared broth with the same plant and had similar symptoms.

The case sought medical treatment and was admitted to Kwong Wah Hospital on May 2. She was discharged on the same day in stable condition. Her friend sought medical treatment from a private doctor and was stable requiring no hospitalisation.

A CHP spokesman said tests of the unused plants and the case's urine sample by the Hospital Authority Toxicology Reference Laboratory revealed the presence of substances including gelsemium alkaloids.

"*Cassytha Filiformis* usually does not contain gelsemium alkaloids. However, it is a creeping plant which parasitizes on other plants for survival. If it parasitizes on *Gelsemium elegans*, it may absorb gelsemium alkaloids and becomes toxic," the spokesman said. The investigation into this case is on-going.

The spokesman reminded members of the public, especially hikers, to refrain from collecting plants, including their fruits, roots and stems, in the countryside as many of them may contain lethal natural toxins. If they feel unwell after consumption, they should seek advice from healthcare professionals immediately.