

DH alerts public on case of silver poisoning

The Department of Health (DH) today (July 23) appealed to the public not to consume orally or parenterally any product that contains colloidal silver and to seek medical consultation immediately if they feel unwell after consumption, in particular if discolouration of the skin is developed.

The DH was notified by the Hospital Authority (HA) in July 2021 of a case of silver poisoning with a history of consumption of colloidal silver prescribed by a general practitioner.

The case involved a 47-year-old male patient who presented with unsteady gait and sensory loss over extremities in 2018 with a history of consumption of colloidal silver during the period from 2016 to 2018 as prescribed by Dr Leung Sik-chiu at his clinic in Wan Chai. The patient was diagnosed by the HA to be a silver poisoning case.

Upon notification, the DH immediately commenced epidemiological investigation and carried out a site inspection of the clinic.

Initial investigation revealed that the doctor had prescribed oral colloidal silver to this patient. Upon enquiries, the doctor indicated that he had also prescribed colloidal silver to other patients in the past year.

The DH's investigation of the case is continuing. With the patient's consent, the DH has referred the case to the Medical Council of Hong Kong for further investigation.

Silver has no known function in the human body and is not an essential nutrient. Chronic exposure to colloidal silver can cause argyria, which is the permanent bluish-grey discolouration of the skin. Systemic manifestations including anaemia, bone marrow suppression, liver function derangement and neurological deficit can ensue.

In Hong Kong, there is no registered pharmaceutical product that contains colloidal silver as an active ingredient. There is no scientific evidence that supports non-topical (internal) use of colloidal silver for treating any specific disease or condition.

The public is reminded not to consume any product containing colloidal silver, including through oral consumption and intravenous administration, due to its potential risks and the lack of scientific evidence in support of health benefit through the internal use of colloidal silver.