

Recall of Chinese herbal medicine exceeding limits for arsenic (with photo)

The Department of Health (DH) today (October 18) endorsed a licensed Chinese herbal medicine (Chm) wholesaler, Wong Chak Kee Limited, to voluntarily recall from the market a batch of Chm, Herba Pteridis Multifidae (batch number: 180408), as the Chm exceeded the limits for arsenic set out by the Chinese Medicines Board of the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong (CMCHK). As a precautionary measure, Wong Chak Kee Limited is also voluntarily recalling other batches of Herba Pteridis Multifidae distributed by the company from the market.

During the DH's market surveillance, a sample of the above Chm was collected for analysis. The test result from the Government Laboratory revealed that the decoction prepared from the above Chm contained, in terms of the maximum daily intake of the above Chm, about 2.6 times the maximum limit of arsenic set out by CMCHK.

"Arsenic is a heavy metal. Long-term consumption of high levels of arsenic may cause adverse health effects. Major organs affected include the skin, the bladder and the lungs. So far, no adverse report related to the use of the above Chm has been received. Investigations are ongoing," a spokesman for the DH said.

According to the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap 549), Herba Pteridis Multifidae is any or the whole part of Pteris multifida Poir. It is a Schedule 2 Chm of the Ordinance used to clear heat and dampness, disperse swelling and detoxify, as well as cool the blood, and is haemostatic.

Wong Chak Kee Limited has set up a hotline (2857 3332) for related enquiries. The DH will closely monitor the recall.

According to section 52 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap 132), selling any drug not of the nature, substance or quality demanded by the purchaser is liable to a maximum penalty of \$10,000 and three months' imprisonment. Upon completion of investigation, the DH will work with the Department of Justice on prosecution matters and will also refer the case to the CMCHK for possible disciplinary action.

The DH urged members of the public who have purchased the above Chm to stop using it immediately and submit it to the Chinese Medicine Division of the DH on 16/F, AIA Kowloon Tower, Landmark East, 100 How Ming Street, Kwun Tong, Kowloon, during office hours for disposal. Members of the public who have taken the above Chm and feel unwell should seek advice from healthcare professionals.

