

Suspected case of ginkgo seed poisoning under CHP investigation

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (June 13) investigating a suspected case of ginkgo seed poisoning and hence reminded members of the public not to consume large amounts of ginkgo seeds.

The case involves a 57-year-old man. He boiled about 50 ginkgo seeds brought from the Mainland, as a gift from a relative, into ginkgo seed soup yesterday (June 12), and ate them all. He developed dizziness, nausea, vomiting, malaise, a headache and an increase in his heartbeat about two and a half hours after consuming the ginkgo seeds. The patient was admitted to the intensive care unit of Queen Mary Hospital on the same day. His condition became stable after treatment. He is still hospitalised.

"Natural toxins are present in a wide variety of plants, some of which are commonly consumed as food, including ginkgo seeds. Ginkgo seeds contain toxins which are mainly neurotoxic. Vomiting, irritability and tonic or clonic convulsions are the typical symptoms in ginkgo seed poisoning and usually begin one to 12 hours after ingestion. Children are especially susceptible to this type of food poisoning. In severe cases where large amounts have been taken or the individuals are susceptible, loss of consciousness and death may occur," a spokesman for the CHP explained.

"It has been reported that ingestion of 10 to 50 pieces of cooked ginkgo seeds at one time can cause acute poisoning in humans. The unripe and uncooked seeds are more toxic, as the toxicity is reduced after cooking," the spokesman added.

The spokesman appealed to the public not to consume raw ginkgo seeds and should limit the intake. Particular attention should be given to children, the elderly and individuals with poor health conditions. If symptoms of poisoning develop, they should immediately consult medical professionals for advice and prompt treatment.