

Two suspected puffer fish poisoning cases under CHP investigation

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (February 21) investigating two suspected puffer fish poisoning cases affecting a total of four persons, and hence reminded members of the public not to consume puffer fish.

The first case involved three males aged 55 to 59, who developed limb and lip numbness and vomiting about two to four hours after consuming cooked puffer fish, which was caught in local waters and given by a friend, at a friend's home for dinner yesterday (February 20).

All patients sought medical attention in the small hours today. Two of them attended the accident and emergency department (AED) of Tuen Mun Hospital, while one attended the AED of Pok Oi Hospital. All required hospitalisation and one has been discharged after treatment.

The second case involved a 59-year-old female, who developed limb and perioral numbness, vomiting and weakness about one hour after consuming cooked puffer fish for dinner yesterday. She attended the AED of Pok Oi Hospital and was admitted for management.

All patients have been in a stable condition. Investigations by the CHP are continuing.

A spokesman for the CHP said that consumption of puffer fish is the main cause of food poisoning from tetrodotoxin. Tetrodotoxin is a potent water-soluble neurotoxin that can affect the central nervous system.

"Organs such as the liver, gonads and skin of puffer fish have high concentrations of tetrodotoxin. Being heat-stable, the toxin does not decompose upon cooking, boiling, drying or freezing. Tetrodotoxin intoxication can cause problems in respiration or circulation and is potentially fatal. There is no known antidote or antitoxin. Members of the public are advised to avoid purchasing and preparing puffer fish or unknown fish for consumption to prevent tetrodotoxin-related food poisoning," the spokesman said.