



衛生署

Department of Health



Volume 1, Number 2
December 2008

Inside This Issue

- I. Low blood sugar incidents related to virility products P. 1-4
 - Background 1
 - Investigation & findings 2-4
 - Enforcement Action and Health Promotion Activities 4
 - Health message 4
 - Useful websites & links 4

- II. News corner P.5

- III. Statistics of poison exposure cases identified in AED P. 6-7



Low blood sugar incidents related to virility products

Background

Since February 2008, low blood sugar attacks have been reported among adult men who have taken virility products. An undeclared anti-diabetic agent was detected in the products taken by these men. As of November 2008, more than 70 persons were affected. The following paragraphs summarize the incidents and deliver health messages to the public to prevent recurrence .

From February to November 2008, the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) received notifications from the Hospital Authority (HA) of 76 cases of low blood sugar attacks related to the use of virility products. These cases involved 73 patients, with 3 cases being repeat victims. All patients were male, aged between 39 and 87 years with a median age of 72. About 58% of them were retirees. Most (90 %) of these patients were in Hong Kong when the symptoms of low blood sugar were developed. The remaining 7 patients developed symptoms in the Mainland China and received further treatment in hospitals in Hong Kong.

Month	No. of cases
Feb	23
Mar	14
Apr	14
May	4
Jun	7
Jul	6
Aug	3
Sep	1
Oct	3
Nov	1
Total	76

Table 1 Monthly notifications of cases



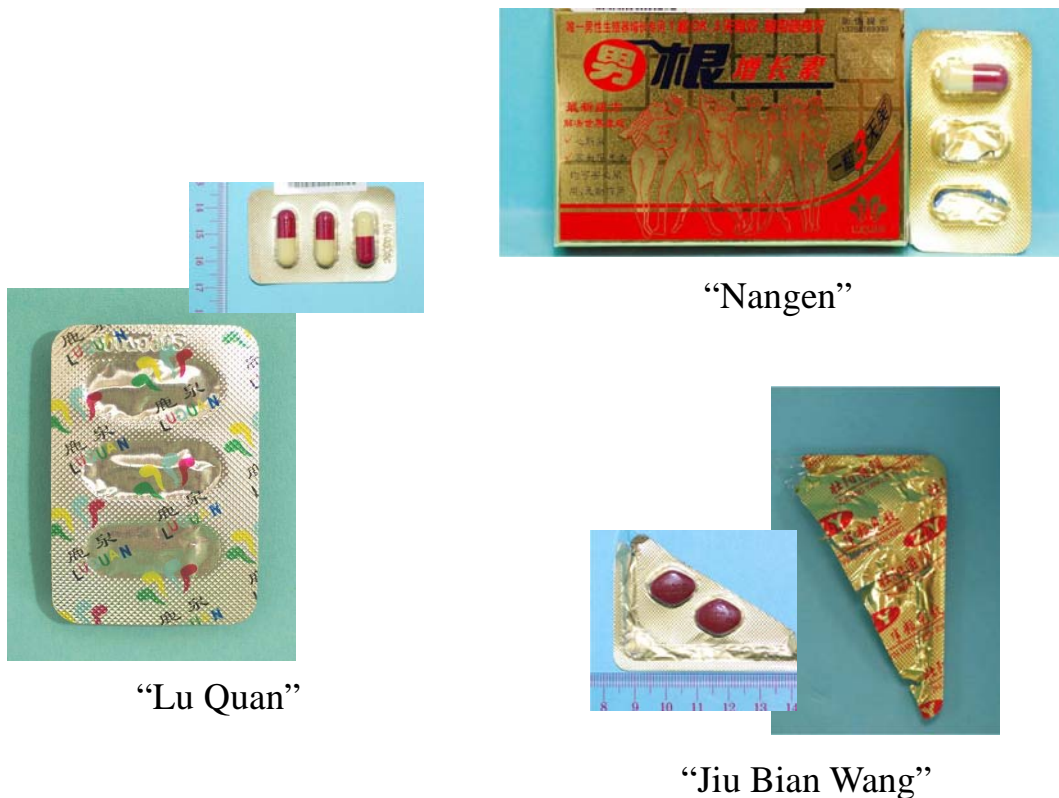
衛生防護中心
Centre for Health Protection



The number of cases notified to CHP was the highest in the first month and majority of cases (> 80%) were notified in the first half of 2008 (Table 1). Only 5 cases were notified in the past three months.



Figure 1. Products confirmed to contain glibenclamide and sildenafil



Investigation and findings

All patients presented with symptoms and signs of low blood sugar including dizziness, sweating, confusion, and collapse. On admission, they had very low levels of blood glucose (as low as 0.8 mmol/L; the normal range is 3.9 to 6.0 mmol/L). Glibenclamide (anti-diabetic drug) and sildenafil (drug for treating erectile dysfunction) metabolites were detected in the patients' urine. While 3 patients died and 2 patients had neurological impairment requiring long term care, the rest recovered after treatment.

Upon receiving notifications from HA, immediate joint investigations by the Department of Health, Government Laboratory and the Police Force were carried out.



Chemical analyses of product remnants kept in intact blister packs (Figure 1) obtained from the patients showed the presence of glibenclamide and sildenafil. Under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance of Hong Kong, products containing glibenclamide or sildenafil must be registered before sale and can only be sold on a doctor's prescription and under supervision of a pharmacist.

Glibenclamide is an undeclared oral anti-diabetic drug which was found present in these products. However, the amount of glibenclamide found (67-190 mg per capsule) far exceeded the recommended maximum daily dosage by up to 12 times and that can be lethal.

According to the available information, half of the products taken by the cases were obtained from friends, hawkers or shops in the Mainland. Other sources included friends, illegal salespersons in parks, and medicine companies in Hong Kong.



Education Corner

Side effects of Oral Anti-diabetic Drugs

These drugs are used to lower the blood glucose in patients suffering from diabetes. It can cause low blood sugar, which may present as muscle weakness, sweating, confusion. Shock, coma and death may occur in severe cases.

Side effects of Drugs for Erectile Dysfunction

These drugs are used for treating impotence. They relax the blood vessels in the penis, allowing more blood to enter to achieve an erection. Common side effects of these drugs include low blood pressure, headache, vomiting, dizziness, and transient vision disturbances. It may interact with nitrates found in some prescription drugs (such as nitroglycerin) and may lower blood pressure of patients to dangerous levels. Improper use of sildenafil may pose serious health risks, especially for patients with heart problems.



Among the 73 patients, 31 (42.5 %) of them admitted taking these virility products while 12 (16.4 %) of them claimed the consumption was for other reasons such as maintaining good health, treating cough and insomnia. The remaining 30 patients (41.1 %) either denied taking these products or could not be interviewed.

About 83.3% of the patients who aged above 60 and 40.0 % of the patients who aged 60 or under are current smokers. These findings are much higher than the male smoking prevalence for the same age groups reported in a household survey conducted in 2005, which were around 28% and 24% respectively. In fact, smoking is one of the risk factors for erectile dysfunction.

Enforcement Action and Health Promotion Activities

Press releases were issued to increase public awareness of the event. Various channels including TV announcement, media interview and pamphlets distribution were used to inform the public of the risk of taking products from unknown sources. Letters to health professionals were issued to alert them of the incidents and to report any suspected cases to CHP. Letters were sent to traders of western and Chinese medicines to remind them not to sell unregistered drugs and drugs of unknown origins. Law enforcement actions including market surveillance in local medicine companies were also enhanced.



Health message

- There are many causes of erectile dysfunction. Many of these causes do not require medications.
- Seek professional advice when encountering any sexual difficulties.
- Do not consume unregistered drugs or health products from unknown or unclear sources claiming to improve sexual performance.

Useful websites and links

Press Releases

<http://www.dh.gov.hk/english/press/press.html>

Men's Health Programme

<http://www.hkmenshealth.com/>

**News Corner****News Update on Melamine incident**

In early September, 2008, it was reported that renal stones were detected in children who had consumed melamine tainted milk products in Mainland China. According to the World Health Organization, there were more than 51,000 cases as of 8 December and 6 patients had died.

In Hong Kong, CHP conducts epidemiological investigation and surveillance on cases of renal stones in children suspected to be related to consumption of melamine tainted milk products. As of 16 December, there were 13 such cases suspected. Their ages ranged from 30 months to 10 years old. Altogether, 4 girls and 9 boys were affected. All were either born or resided in Hong Kong except 1 patient was born and resided in China. 3 patients had history of passing blood in urine, pain during urination and/or change in frequency of urination. The others were asymptomatic. The suspected melamine tainted milk products included liquid milk and biscuits. These were purchased from shops in the Mainland in 9 cases. CHP has set up a hotline 2125 1133 to cater for individuals who have consumed milk products contaminated with melamine or those who are experiencing kidney or urinary symptoms. As of November, 10 510 enquiries were received.

The Hospital Authority is providing screening service at designated clinics for children aged 12 years or below with history of consumption of melamine tainted products. Further assessment and treatment will be conducted as appropriate.

Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has enhanced its surveillance to test for melamine in food available in Hong Kong. Results of the surveillance tests are available on the website of CFS (http://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/whatsnew/whatsnew_fstr/whatsnew_fstr_Melamine_in_Mainland_Milk_Powder_Incident.html)

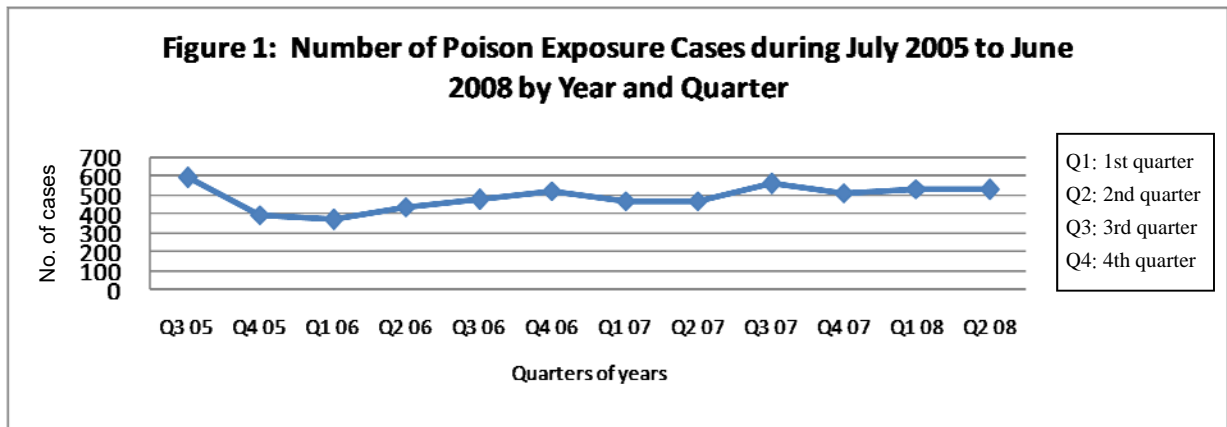
The public should watch out for announcements of the results of tests conducted by the CFS and take note of the health advice given.



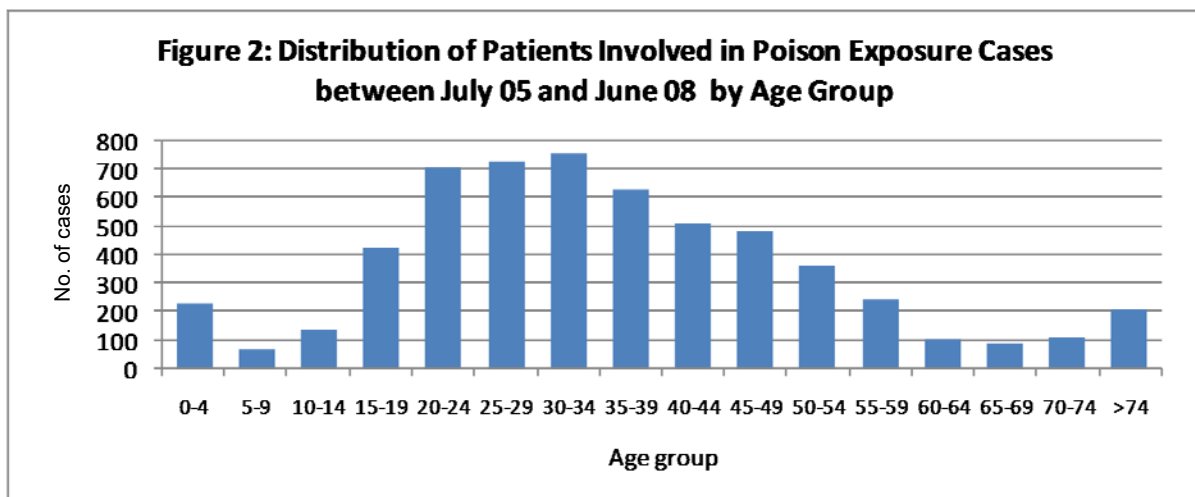


Statistics of poison exposures identified in AED in the past 3 years

From 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2008, 5823 cases of poison exposure cases were identified at the Accident & Emergency Departments (AEDs) of six major regional hospitals (QMH, PYNEH, UCH, PWH, PMH & TMH). Figure 1 shows that the trend has remained steady over the past 3 years.



Among the 5823 cases, about half were aged between 20 and 39 (Figure 2) and the median age was 33 years. The female to male ratio was about 3:2.

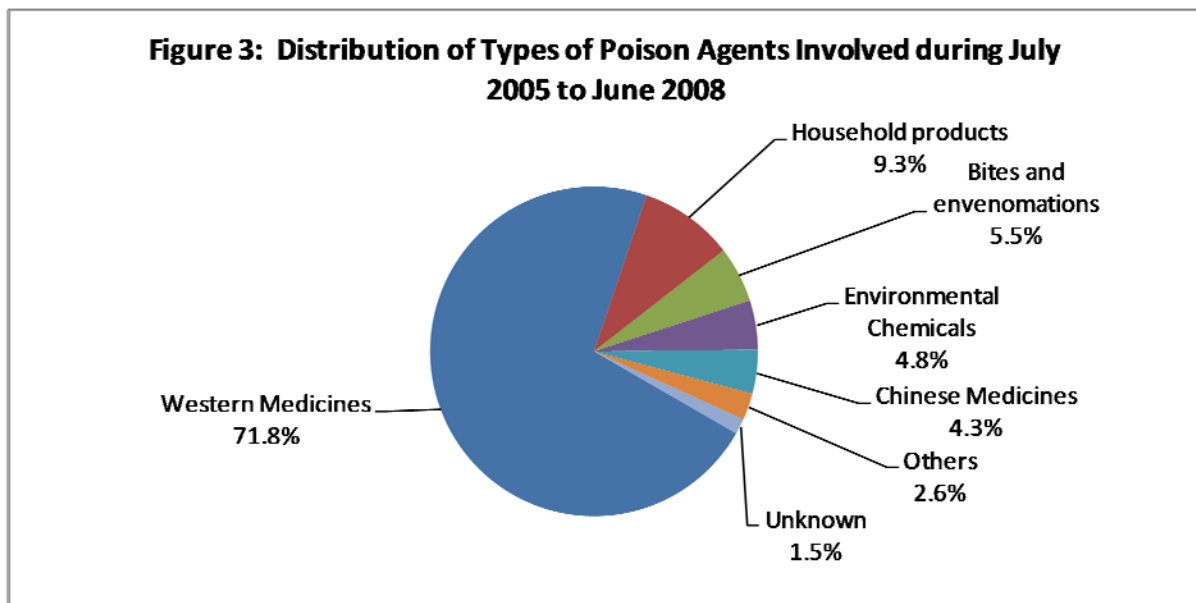


Apart from suicide (53%), the reasons for poison exposure included accidents (14%) and drug abuse (14%). Other reasons included treatment related drug use and drug reaction, and unknown cause.



Reasons of exposure differ across different age groups. Accidents were most common in people below 10 years of age. Suicide and drug abuse were the reasons for most exposure cases aged between 10 and 54.

Poison exposures involving western medicines were by far, the most common poisonous agents (Figure 3). The top 5 incriminated western medicines were sedatives & hypnotics (29.3%), non-opioid analgesics (15.1%), antidepressants (9.2%), central nervous stimulants (7.9%), and cold & flu medicines (7.3%).



Regarding the outcome of all poison exposures, about half (50.2%) of the cases required no hospital admission. Among those who were hospitalized, one-tenth (12.5%) required treatment in Intensive Care Unit. 38 cases (0.7%) of all exposure cases died. The age of casualties ranged between 15 and 88 (median = 53). The poisonous agents mainly included western medicines, household chemicals and carbon monoxide. The majority (71%) of the fatal cases were related to suicide or abuse of poisonous agents.

Editorial Team:

Dr TH LEUNG, Dr Tina MOK, Ms Linda Woo, Dr Chris CHAU, Dr Andrew CHEN, Mr KH CHU, Mr Louis CHIANG, Ms Fion YING, and Mr WS LEE.