

A DEADLY BENEVOLENT ACT : A CASE OF UNINTENTIONAL CASSAVA POISONING

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Introduction

Cassava thrives in Sabah and serves as a staple food for many residents. However, it contains cyanogenic compounds, raising concerns about its potential impact on consumer health especially when not prepared or cooked well.

Case description

A 3-year-old non-local boy presented to our centre, Hospital Lahad Datu, 1 hour post Cassava ingestion, given by his neighbour.

The cassava was fried and patient had consumed approximately 5 pieces before he started to exhibit gastrointestinal symptoms. Upon arrival to our centre, he was drowsy, hypotensive and tachypneic. Eventually, he was intubated and was resuscitated accordingly.

Case was discussed with Consultant Toxicologist and was advised for administration of intravenous hydroxycobalamine 70mg/kg, however, the antidote was not available in our centre. Ground retrieval was arranged to have the antidote brought to our centre from Hospital Sandakan. Typical “raspberry” urinary discolouration was seen upon hydroxycobalamine administration in this patient.

Subsequently, patient was admitted to High Dependency Unit (HDU). Throughout admission, he developed multiple complications include kidney injury, metabolic acidosis, coagulopathy and hyperglycaemia. He was able to be extubated after 3 days and was admitted for a span of 6 days before he was discharged well.



Discussion

Toxic substance called glucoside can be found in Cassava. When exposed to digestive enzymes, it is hydrolysed and releases hydrocyanic acid, leading to toxicity. Cyanide poisoning can present with symptoms such as altered mental status, gastrointestinal disturbances, and seizures—an array of signs that overlap with other toxicities and poisonings. Physicians must maintain a high level of suspicion for cyanide poisoning, particularly when risk factors are present, and ensure prompt administration of the antidote.

Conclusion

Hydroxocobalamin is a potent antidote in suspected cyanide poisoning. Administering antidote promptly can substantially improve recovery prospects.

Keyword: cassava, cyanide, toxicity

References

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