



# THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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nyc.gov/health

May 22, 2008

## **DOHMH Health Alert #10: Death Associated with OTC Aphrodisiac**

- An illegally sold OTC aphrodisiac derived from toad venom and known as *Piedra*, *Rock Hard*, *Hard Rock*, *Love Stone*, *Black Stone* or *Chinese Rock* has been implicated in the death of a 35-year-old NYC man.
- Physicians should call the New York City Poison Control Center at (212) POISONS (764-7667) 24 hours a day about any patients with a clinical picture resembling digoxin overdose, a history of ingested aphrodisiacs or OTC male-enhancement products.
- Physicians should be sure to ask the patient for a detailed description of the product.

**Please Distribute to All Clinical Staff in Emergency Medicine, Primary Care, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Cardiology and Intensive Care.**

Dear Provider,

The New York City (NYC) Poison Control Center (PCC) notified the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) that a 35-year-old man died after ingesting an aphrodisiac called *Piedra*, which was purchased in a neighborhood store. The product is also known as *Stone*, *Rock Hard*, *Hard Rock*, *Love Stone*, *Black Stone* or *Chinese Rock* and is illegal for sale in New York City.

The patient presented to the emergency department within 12 hours after ingesting the product with complaints of chest and abdominal pain. He was noted to have bradycardia, heart block, a potassium of 7.0 mEq/L and a digoxin level of 2.9 ng/mL. PCC suspected that the patient ingested a product containing ingredients derived from toad venom intended for topical use. The patient was treated with a total of 35 vials of digoxin-specific Fab over the next 12-16 hours. He initially showed signs of improvement, but about 36 hours after ingestion he once again developed heart block and rapidly degenerated into ventricular tachycardia and ventricular fibrillation. Standard resuscitation combined with additional doses of digoxin-specific Fab was unsuccessful and the patient died.

The findings in this patient are highly suggestive of cardiotoxicity from ingestion of a purported aphrodisiac containing bufadienolides and bufotenine and intended for topical use. Ingestion and dermal absorption of such a product can cause symptoms of digitalis poisoning including dysrhythmias, heart block, hypotension, and vomiting. Cardioactive steroids, including bufadienolides, have a narrow therapeutic index, and unintentional therapeutic

intoxication is well documented. These steroids can adversely affect the myocardium, and the most life-threatening manifestations of toxicity include arrhythmias, ventricular ectopy, sinus bradycardia, atrial arrhythmias, and hyperkalemia.

Be highly suspicious if a patient presents with a clinical picture resembling digoxin overdose and reports the use of aphrodisiacs or OTC male-enhancement products. If you or your patients suspect a poisoning, call the NYC Poison Control Center 24 hours a day at (212) POISONS (764-7667) or 1-800-222-1222; Spanish-speaking callers, call (212) VENENOS (836-3667).



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*Piedra (Stone, Rock Hard, Hard Rock, Love Stone, Black Stone or Chinese Rock) is a hard, dark brown square and measures less than a square inch. It may be packaged in a clear plastic bag with incomplete labeling. The product is not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and is currently listed on an FDA import alert for Chinese Herbal Medicines. The product may also contain bufotenin, a controlled substance.*

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