Rat poison contamination

The active ingredient in rat poison is brodifacoum. It is used in baits to kill rodents such as mice and rats. It is sometimes referred to as a super-warfarin, because it is longer acting than the drug Warfarin. Warfarin is used to prevent blood clots in people.

How does brodifacoum cause poisoning?

Brodifacoum reduces Vitamin K in the body which leads to decreased blood clotting ability. If clotting ability is reduced significantly, bleeding can occur.

How much brodifacoum do you need to get sick?

It has not been established how much is needed. It varies from person to person. However, based on cases where bait has been consumed, a significant amount of bait in a contaminated food would need to be eaten to cause poisoning.

Children who have eaten "mouthful" amounts of bait have developed bleeding problems. The minimum amount required to depress normal blood clotting is estimated to be approximately 1.5mg for a child weighing 10kg.

Commonly available baits contain up to approximately 50mg/kg. To eat 1.5mg of brodifacoum from bait, a child would need to eat approximately 30 grams of bait, which would be equivalent to a number of teaspoon size doses. The amount needed in an older child or adult would be proportionately higher as the body weight increased.

Signs and Symptoms:

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Treatment:

The antidote for proven poisoning is vitamin K. Exactly how this is given will depend on the person’s clinical condition. As brodifacoum is a long-acting anticoagulant (a drug that prevents blood clotting), treatment may be needed for some weeks, but this will vary from case to case.

Effects of other medications/diseases

A person already on medication that affects blood clotting, for example warfarin, will be affected by a much smaller dose of brodifacoum than someone who is not on medication. In addition, a person with significant pre-existing liver disease may also be more easily affected as they could already have abnormalities in their blood clotting system.

There are a number of other prescribed drugs and diseases that interact with brodifacoum, and these should be discussed with a general practitioner.

Help and assistance:

If a person is concerned they may have eaten contaminated food, they should contact their local general practitioner as soon as possible.

Further information can be obtained by telephoning 13 HEALTH (13 432584).