Kambo

Summary

- Kambo is a poison used as a traditional medicine in purging or cleansing rituals.
- There is a risk of serious adverse reactions, especially if kambo enters the bloodstream.
- Symptoms are strong and immediate and may include severe vomiting, dizziness, fainting and swollen lips or face.
- Kambo is not commonly used in Australia but is available from specific practitioners at certain ceremonies.
- Anyone using Kambo and experiencing these symptoms should seek urgent medical assistance.

What is kambo?

Kambo is a poison used as a traditional medicine in purging or cleansing rituals, primarily in South America. It is a waxy substance collected by scraping the skin of an Amazonian tree frog, Phyllomedusa bicolor.

Kambo contains many different compounds, some of which have been identified as potentially toxic (poisonous) in very small amounts.

How and where is kambo used?

At a kambo ceremony (or kambo circle), the top layer of skin on the arm or leg is blistered in several places with a hot stick and small amounts of kambo are applied to the open wounds.

Kambo is not commonly used in Australia but is available from specific practitioners at kambo ceremonies. Kambo ceremonies are usually advertised on social media.

What are the risks of using kambo?

The symptoms after kambo has been applied can be strong and immediate, and include:

- severe vomiting
- dizziness
- fainting
- swollen lips or face.

Anyone using kambo and experiencing these symptoms needs urgent medical assistance. Call 000 for an ambulance or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

There is a small risk of serious adverse (negative)side effects or reactions in some people, including seizures and death, especially if kambo accidently enters the bloodstream.

Kambo is not a registered medicine in Australia

Registered medicines in Australia must meet Australian manufacturing and safety standards. Kambo is not registered in Australia, so its safety and effectiveness cannot be guaranteed.

Medicines purchased in other countries or on the internet may not be manufactured to Australian standards.

If you are thinking of using any complementary medicines, discuss the possible benefits and harms with your healthcare professionals before you start taking them.

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Where to get help

- In an emergency, call triple zero (000)
- Your GP (doctor)
- Victorian Poisons Information Centre, Tel. 13 11 26 – 24 hours a day, seven days a week– for advice about poisonings, suspected poisonings, bites and stings, mistakes with medicines and poisoning prevention advice.

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