Kava and Severe Liver Injury

Recent reports indicate a potential risk of severe liver injury associated with the use of kava-containing dietary supplements. Kava (Piper methysticum) is a plant native to the islands of the South Pacific, where it is commonly used to prepare a traditional beverage. Supplements containing the herbal ingredient kava are promoted for relaxation (to relieve stress, anxiety and tension), sleeplessness, menopausal symptoms, and other uses. The FDA has not made a determination about the ability of kava dietary supplements to provide such benefits.

Although liver damage appears to be rare, kava-containing products have been associated with liver-related injuries—including hepatitis, cirrhosis, and liver failure—in over 25 reports of adverse events in other countries. Four people required liver transplants. In the United States, the FDA has received a report of a previously healthy young female who required a liver transplant, as well as several reports of liver-related injuries.

People who have liver disease or liver problems, or people who are taking drug products that can affect the liver, should talk to a physician before using kava-containing supplements.

Consumers who use a kava-containing dietary supplement and who experience signs of illness associated with liver disease should also consult a physician. Symptoms of serious liver disease include jaundice (yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes) and brown urine. Other symptoms of liver disease can include nausea, vomiting, light-colored stools, unusual tiredness, weakness, stomach or abdominal pain, and loss of appetite.

The FDA urges consumers and health-care professionals to report any adverse events associated with the use of kava-containing products or other dietary supplements to the FDA's MedWatch program by calling its toll-free number (1-800-332-1088) or through the Internet (www.fda.gov/medwatch/how.htm).

The presence of kava in a supplement should be identified on the product label in the "Supplement Facts" box.

The FDA will continue to investigate the relationship, if any, between the use of dietary supplements containing kava and liver injury. The agency will alert consumers, and if warranted, take additional action as more information becomes available. For more information on dietary supplements, see www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/supplmnt.html.

More FDA Resources to Counter Terrorism

Well before the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the FDA had been working to counter terrorism. For example, in recent years the agency had been advising industry and consumers on food safety and security. And the FDA approved Cipro (ciprofloxacin) in August 2000 for use in people who develop inhalational anthrax.

After the attacks, the FDA's counterterrorism efforts intensified. This included easing a potential medication shortage for the victims of the mailed anthrax powder by clarifying that the antibiotics doxycycline and penicillin G procaine are effective and approved for the treatment of all forms of anthrax infections.

More recently, thanks to $151 million in additional funding from Congress, the FDA has been able to initiate many steps that will strengthen the nation's defenses against terrorism. To safeguard the more than $250 billion worth of FDA-regulated food that Americans consume each year, the agency is hiring 673 new import investigators, laboratory analysts, compliance officers, criminal investigators, and other personnel. Some of these employees will support domestic inspections, but most will help monitor the safety of imported food.

The FDA's counter-terrorism mission also includes expediting the development, review and production of drugs, vaccines, blood products, and diagnostic tools for the prevention and treatment of terrorism-associated injuries. The agency is hiring 218 new employees who will carry out these functions.

Commonly Used Names For Kava

- ava
- ava pepper
- awa
- intoxicating pepper
- kava
- kava pepper
- kava root
- kava-kava
- kawa
- kawa-kawa
- kew
- Piper methysticum
- Piper methysticum Forst.f.
- Piper methysticum G. Forst.
- rauschpfeffer
- sakau
- tonga
- wurzelstock
- yangona