

Cantaridine

Cantharidin is a terpenoid poison that is produced by many species of blister beetles. Among the most well-known is *Lytta vesicatoria*, which is known as the "Spanish fly". These beetles produce a secretion that is highly toxic. When this fluid comes into contact with the skin, it forms painful, purulent growths on the skin.

In the Middle Ages, these flies were collected, dried and used as an aphrodisiac. Cantharidin induces blood flow to the genitals and can cause an erection.

Most of the information on cantharidin comes from observations of poisonings of horses grazing on pastures with high levels of these beetles.

The lethal dose in humans is 30 mg and leads to bleeding, abdominal pain, diarrhoea and disruption of the oesophagus, stomach and intestines. The person dies of heart failure or kidney damage.

The mechanism of biological action is based on inducing apoptosis of cells. In modern medicine, the use of cantharidin in the destruction of cancer cells in oncology is being considered. In dermatology, it is used in the treatment of warts and skin growths.



Lytta vesicatoria

Links

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References

- Kantaridin: přírodní bioaktivní molekula s dlouhou historií - Jiří Patočka, Kamil Kuča
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