Botulinum Toxin Injection

What is botulinum toxin?
In Hong Kong, botulinum toxin is a pharmaceutical product and must be registered with the Pharmacy and Poisons Board before it can be supplied in the market. It is a prescription-only medicine which must only be prescribed and supplied by a locally registered doctor or obtained from a pharmacy upon a doctor’s prescription. Botulinum toxin can be used for medical purposes (e.g. treatment of overactive bladder) and cosmetic purposes. When used for cosmetic purposes, the product is used to reduce the appearance of wrinkles on the forehead, between the brows and around the eyes due to muscle contraction. It may also be used on wrinkles on the lower part of the face and neck, sometimes in combination with dermal fillers. The toxin removes wrinkles by weakening or paralysing certain muscles, or by blocking certain nerves.

Description of the procedure
During the procedure, the doctor will sterilise the skin of the targeted area and then inject small amounts of botulinum toxin into the targeted region of muscles using a fine needle. The injection site should be treated gently, and recipients should not massage or rub the treated areas by themselves after treatment. Results are often visible by around 8 days.

Potential risks and complications
- As human skin acts as a natural barrier to microorganisms, any procedure that damages the skin may pose the risk of infection. Other complications associated with the procedure include pain, bleeding, haematoma formation, bruising, and scarring.
- Due to the weakening of associated muscles, patients receiving the injection may have problems with chewing or even swallowing, speaking or breathing. These problems may happen hours, days, or weeks after an injection.
- In some cases, the botulinum toxin may spread and affect other areas away from the injection site, resulting in symptoms including hoarseness, drooping of the eyelids, double vision or blurred vision.

Advice to the public
1. Injections should ONLY be performed by locally registered doctors.
2. The cosmetic effects of botulinum toxin after injections are temporary, which
means that the effects will gradually disappear.

3. Understand the procedure, the potential risks and complications before you decide to undergo botulinum toxin injection, and consult your doctor if necessary.

4. You should not receive the treatment if you have a history of allergy to the botulinum toxin or there is infection or inflammation on the injection site.

5. If you are referred by a beauty service provider to a doctor to undergo the cosmetic procedure, you should request the full name of the doctor in writing. In Hong Kong, the full list of registered doctors can be found at the website of the Medical Council of Hong Kong (http://www.mchk.org.hk/doctor/index.htm). Customers are advised to enquire about the professional qualifications and relevant experience of the doctor.

6. Botulinum toxin is a pharmaceutical product and must be registered with the Pharmacy and Poisons Board before it can be supplied in the market. All registered pharmaceutical products must carry a Hong Kong registration number on their sales packs in the format of "HK-xxxxx". Unregistered pharmaceutical products should not be used because their safety, quality and efficacy are not yet guaranteed. If in doubt, you can visit the following website of the Department of Health Drug Office to check if a pharmaceutical product (e.g. botulinum toxin) has been registered with the Pharmacy and Poisons Board (http://www.drugoffice.gov.hk/eps/do/en/consumer/search_drug_database.html).

7. Topical anaesthetic cream may be applied for relief of pain or to desensitise skin before injection. According to the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Chapter 138), topical anaesthetic and botulinum toxin are pharmaceutical products, which must be registered before it can be supplied in Hong Kong. Topical anaesthetic usually contains lignocaine, which is a Part 1 poison with common side effects including hypersensitivity reaction, and can only be supplied by registered medical practitioners or hospitals, or be sold in pharmacies under the supervision of a registered pharmacist.

8. If you develop any signs or symptoms of infection like fever, or feel unwell after the procedure, please seek medical attention immediately.