

Botulism

Personal Health Fact Sheet

What is Botulisms?

Botulism is caused by the bacteria Clostridium botulinum which produces a potent neurotoxin. Botulism toxin is one of the most lethal substances known to man.

How is it spread?

Botulism is spread by ingesting the toxin in improperly prepared or canned food. Pasteurized and lightly cured foods held without refrigeration are also vulnerable. In the event of a bioterrorism incident, the route of exposure could be aerosol or food and water contamination. Botulism is **not** spread person to person

How is it treated?

- ▶ Botulism is treated with an antitoxin. CDC (Centers for Disease Control) maintains the national botulism anti-toxin supply. The anti-toxin is made from horse serum and it blocks the action of toxin circulating in the blood.
- ▶ If symptoms occur, individuals should seek treatment immediately. Botulism can be fatal and should be considered a medical emergency
- ▶ Paralysis and respiratory failure may be the result of ingesting or inhaling botulism. If diagnosed and treated early, the antitoxin is effective in reducing the severity of these symptoms. The paralysis slowly improves, usually over several weeks to months.

How can we prevent Botulism?

- ▶ Properly home can foods to adequate time, pressure and temperature requirements.
- ▶ Do not open food containers that are bulging.
- ▶ Do not eat or “taste test” foods with off odors.
- ▶ Do not feed honey to infants.

SYMPTOMS OF BOTULISM

- ▶ Symptoms usually occur 6 hours – 2 weeks after eating or inhaling botulism toxin.
- ▶ Visual difficulty – blurring or double vision
- ▶ Difficulty speaking
- ▶ Difficulty swallowing and dry mouth
- ▶ Flaccid paralysis on both sides of the body
- ▶ Respiratory dysfunction and failure
- ▶ Vomiting, constipation, or diarrhea
- ▶ Paralysis of breathing muscles can cause a person to stop breathing and die.



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