

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Botulism

What is Botulism?

Botulism is a rare but serious illness that is caused by a toxin or bacteria. There are three main types of Botulism: Foodborne Botulism, Wound Botulism, and Infant Botulism. Eating foods that contain the Botulism toxin causes Foodborne Botulism. Wound Botulism is caused when a wound is infected with the Botulism bacteria. Eating spores of the Botulism bacteria causes infant Botulism.

Who can get Botulism?

Anyone who eats food that has been contaminated with the toxin or is infected by the bacteria can become ill.

What are the symptoms?

- Double or blurred vision
- Drooping eyelids
- Slurred speech
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dry mouth
- Muscle weakness
- Infants who become ill with Botulism appear sleepy, eat poorly, are constipated, have a very weak cry and have poor muscle tone.

How long after exposure do symptoms appear?

Foodborne Botulism symptoms can begin 12 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food. In some cases symptoms occur as early as 6 hours or as late as 10 days.

How is Foodborne Botulism spread?

Foodborne Botulism is not spread person-to-person. Eating contaminated foods that contain the toxin or bacteria is how it is spread.

What is the treatment for Botulism?

The Michigan Department of Community Health and/or the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), maintain a supply of Botulism anti-toxin.

What are the complications?

In severe cases, Botulism may cause death. Some patients may need to be on a ventilator for weeks with medical care. Some patients may be tired and have shortness of breath for years after exposure to Botulism. In those cases, long term therapy may be needed.

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How can Botulism be prevented?

Since honey may contain spores of the Botulism bacteria, Infant Botulism can be prevented by not feeding honey to infants less than 12 months old. Seeking medical care for infected wounds can prevent Wound Botulism. Foodborne Botulism is often found in home-canned foods with low acid content (asparagus, green beans, beets and corn). When home canning, follow strict hygiene procedures to reduce contamination of foods. High temperatures destroy the Botulism toxin. Consider boiling the food for 10 minutes before eating to ensure safety.

For more information on Botulism, call (248) 858-1286 or toll free 1 (888) 350-0900, Ext.8-1286.