



Central Michigan District Health Department

Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities



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Botulism

What is Botulism?

Botulism is a muscle-paralyzing disease caused by a toxin made by bacteria.

There are five main kinds of botulism:

- **Foodborne** botulism occurs when a person eats contaminated food that leads to illness within a few hours to days. Food borne botulism is a public health emergency because the contaminated food may still be available to other persons besides the patient.
- **Infant** botulism occurs in a small number of susceptible infants each year who harbor these bacteria in their intestinal tract.
- **Wound** botulism occurs when wounds are infected with bacteria that secrete toxins.
- **Adult** botulism is rare but occurs the same way infant botulism does.
- **Iatrogenic** botulism can occur from an accidental overdose of botulism toxin.

Botulism is not spread from one person to another. Foodborne botulism can occur in all age groups.

How do you get it?

Infants (under one year of age) can obtain botulism from eating honey. Children and adults can get botulism from eating foods processed in unsafe ways, either at home or in restaurants. Wound botulism occurs when an open wound comes into contact with the botulism bacteria.

Symptoms

Adults with botulism:

- Double vision
- Blurred vision
- Slurred speech
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty moving the eyes
- Difficulty breathing
- Drooping eyelids
- Muscle weakness

Infants with botulism:

- Difficulty breathing
- Weak cry
- Pupils that are slow to react to light
- Feed poorly
- Poor muscle tone
- Constipated
- Drooping eye lids

If untreated, these symptoms may progress to cause paralysis of the arms, legs, trunk, and respiratory muscles. In food borne botulism, symptoms generally begin 18 to 36 hours after eating a contaminated food, but they can occur as early as 6 hours or as late as 10 days.

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Treatment for Botulism

If diagnosed early, foodborne and wound botulism can be treated with an antitoxin. This can prevent a patient's symptoms from worsening, but recovery from damage that has occurred may still take many weeks. Wounds should be treated, usually surgically, to remove the bacteria. Respiratory failure and paralysis can occur when botulism is severe.