



Salem/Cumberland County Health Department
BOTULISM
(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

What is botulism?

Botulism is a muscle paralyzing disease caused by a toxin. There are 3 types. Each type can be deadly and are considered medical emergencies.

Foodborne Botulism

Foodborne botulism is caused by eating foods that contain the botulism toxin.

Wound Botulism

Wound botulism is caused by toxin produced from a wound infected by the botulism toxin.

Infant Botulism

Infant botulism is caused by ingesting the spores of botulinum bacteria, which then grow in the intestines and release toxin. **Honey should not be given to children under 1 year of age** because it can cause infant botulism.

What are the symptoms of botulism?

Classic Symptoms

- Double vision
- Blurred vision
- Drooping eyelids
- Slurred speech
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dry mouth
- Muscle weakness through the body

Muscle weakness will begin at the top of the body in the shoulders and travel down the through to the calves. Paralysis of breathing muscles can cause a person to stop breathing and die, breathing assistance will be needed to support life. Symptoms generally begin within 18-36 hours, but they can occur as early as 6 hours or as late as 10 days.



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Symptoms in Infants

- Appear tired
- Feed poorly
- Constipated
- Weak cry
- Poor muscle tone

How is botulism spread?

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

How can botulism be treated?

Botulism can be treated with an antitoxin, which blocks the action of the toxin. This can prevent patients from getting worse, but recovery still takes many weeks. Currently, antitoxin is not regularly given to treat infant botulism.

Are there complications from botulism?

Death can occur if the muscles used for breathing are paralyzed. Approximately 8% of botulism cases result in death. Patients who survive an episode of botulism poisoning may have fatigue and shortness of breath and long term therapy may be needed to help in recovery.