



## **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 the 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?**

The symptoms of Botulism include double vision, blurred vision, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth, and muscle weakness. Babies with Botulism appear tired, have a poor appetite, have difficulty going to the bathroom, and have a weak cry and poor muscle tone. These are all symptoms of the muscle paralysis caused by the bacterial toxin. 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.

### **How is Botulism spread?**

Botulism cannot be spread from person to person. However, food-borne Botulism can affect anyone.

### **How is Botulism diagnosed?**

The most direct way to confirm the diagnosis is to demonstrate the toxin in the patient's serum or stool by injecting serum or stool into mice and looking for signs of Botulism. The bacteria can also be isolated from the stool of persons with food-borne and infant Botulism. These tests can be performed at some state health department laboratories and at the CDC.



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### **How can Botulism be treated?**

The respiratory failure and paralysis that occur with severe Botulism may require a patient to be on a breathing machine (ventilator) for weeks, plus intensive medical and nursing care. After several weeks, the paralysis slowly improves. If diagnosed early, food-borne and wound Botulism can be treated with an anti-toxin. This can prevent patients from getting worse, but recovery still takes many weeks. Doctors may try to remove contaminated food still inside the person by inducing vomiting or by using enemas. Wounds should be treated, usually surgically, to remove the source of the toxin-producing bacteria followed by administration of appropriate antibiotics. An anti-toxin treatment can also be given to infants.

### **How can Botulism be prevented?**

Botulism can be prevented. Food-borne Botulism has often been from home-canned foods with low acid content, such as asparagus, green beans, beets and corn. However, outbreaks of Botulism from more unusual sources such as chopped garlic in oil, chile peppers, tomatoes, carrot juice, improperly handled baked potatoes wrapped in aluminum foil, and home-canned or fermented fish. Persons who do home canning should follow strict hygienic procedures to reduce contamination of foods. Oils with garlic or herbs should be refrigerated. Potatoes which have been baked while wrapped in aluminum foil should be kept hot until served or refrigerated. Since the Botulism toxin is destroyed by high temperatures, persons who eat home-canned foods should consider boiling the food for 10 minutes before eating it to ensure safety. Instructions on safe home canning can be obtained from county extension services or from the US Department of Agriculture. Wound Botulism can be prevented by promptly seeking medical care for infected wounds and by not using street drugs that need to be injected.

### **Where can I get more information on Botulism?**

- Your healthcare provider
- Your local department of health
- The New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services website  
[http://www.state.nj.us/health/er/documents/Botulismfaq\\_english.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/health/er/documents/Botulismfaq_english.pdf)  
DHSS Communicable Disease Service at (609) 588-7500
- The Centers for Disease & Control Prevention website  
[http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease\\_listing/Botulism\\_gi.html#1](http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease_listing/Botulism_gi.html#1)  
1-800-CDC-INFO (4636) for assistance in English and Spanish  
E-mail: [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)