



Botulism

What is Botulism?

Botulism is a rare but serious disease caused by a toxin that is produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*. This bacterium can be found in soil, water, on animals and in contaminated food. The toxin produced is extremely powerful and can cause severe illness in humans.

There are three types of botulism illness – foodborne, wound, and intestinal (adult and infant) botulism.

How are the different types of Botulism spread?

Foodborne Botulism

This rare and potentially life-threatening form of botulism may occur if you ingest food containing *C. botulinum* toxin. Toxin may form in foods which are improperly prepared or processed or improperly canned or stored.

Foodborne botulism symptoms can begin as soon as 12 to 36 hours after consuming the contaminated food product.

Wound Botulism

This rare form of botulism may occur if an open wound becomes contaminated with *C. botulinum*. The bacterium produces toxin which is released into the bloodstream and causes illness.

Wound botulism may take longer before symptoms begin. In some cases, it can take up to 2 weeks after the wound is infected with the bacteria, an average of about 10 days.

What symptoms should I watch for?

If you are suffering from foodborne or wound botulism you may experience the following symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Muscle weakness or paralysis
- Drooping eyelids
- Blurred or double vision
- Dry mouth
- Difficulty in swallowing (drooling) and speaking
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation

Intestinal Botulism

Intestinal botulism typically occurs in children less than 1 year old from eating *C. botulinum* spores (an encapsulated form of the bacteria) which then releases the toxin in the intestine.

Infants and adults who are suffering from intestinal botulism may experience the following symptoms:

- Constipation
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of facial expression
- Weakness
- An altered or weak cry
- A poor suck
- A striking loss of head control, commonly referred to as “floppy baby syndrome”

In severe cases of all three forms of botulism, paralysis of the legs, arms and/or breathing muscles can occur, and hospitalization may be required and is potentially fatal. It is important to seek medical attention immediately if you suspect that you or an infant are suffering from botulism.

What is the treatment for Botulism?

Your healthcare provider may offer you a botulism antitoxin (which will stop the spread of the toxin in your body), antibiotics, or appropriate supportive care in response to your symptoms.

How do I protect myself and others?

- Follow proper home canning techniques – especially when canning low acid foods such as asparagus, green beans, beets, corn and fish or meat.
- Do not eat canned foods from dented, punctured or bulging cans (either home-canned or store bought).
- Persons who eat home-canned foods should consider boiling the food for 10 minutes before eating to ensure safety as the botulism toxin is destroyed by high temperatures.
- Oils infused with garlic and herbs should be kept refrigerated.
- Honey may contain *C. botulinum* spores and should not be fed to children who are less than 12 months old. Honey is safe for persons 1 year of age and older because their stomach acid will destroy the ingested spore before they produce toxin.
- Open wounds should be kept clean and covered to prevent any contamination.

Is there anything special I need to know?

Botulism is not spread directly from person to person.