

Botulism



What is Botulism?

Botulism is a rare, muscle-paralyzing disease caused by nerve toxin spores made by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*. The spores are found in soil worldwide. There are three main kinds of botulism: foodborne botulism, infant botulism, and wound botulism.

All forms of botulism can be fatal and are considered medical emergencies. Foodborne botulism can be especially dangerous. Many people can be poisoned by eating contaminated food.

What are the symptoms of Botulism?

The first symptoms of botulism may include:

- Double or blurred vision
- Drooping eyelids
- Slurred speech
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dry mouth
- Muscle weakness (moving from the shoulders to the feet)

If a health care provider cannot identify and treat the illness early, the symptoms progress to paralysis of the arms, legs, trunk and respiratory system.

For foodborne botulism, symptoms begin from six hours to two weeks after eating toxin-containing foods.

Infants with botulism appear tired, eat poorly, are constipated, and have a weak cry and limp muscles.

Can Botulism be spread from person to person?

No, botulism is not known to be spread from person to person.

How is Botulism Treated?

Botulism can be treated with an antitoxin which blocks the action of toxin circulating in the blood. This antitoxin stops further development of the disease, but cannot reverse paralysis that is already present. The antitoxin is effective in reducing the severity of symptoms if administered early in the course of the disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintains the

nation's supply of the antitoxin. A physician diagnosing a case of botulism must contact the CDC through their state health department in order to get the antitoxin. Public health officials must be contacted immediately about potential cases of botulism.

The respiratory failure and paralysis that occur with severe botulism may require patients to be on a ventilator for weeks, plus intensive medical and nursing care. After several weeks, the paralysis slowly improves. Intensive medical and nursing care in a hospital is the basis of treatment for all forms of botulism. Often a breathing machine (ventilator) is needed to help people breath until they recover from the toxin, which can take up to eight weeks.

If diagnosed early, foodborne and wound botulism can be treated with an antitoxin. This blocks the ability of the toxin to circulate in the blood. In cases of foodborne botulism, doctors may try to remove contaminated food still in the stomach by inducing vomiting or by using enemas. In cases of wound botulism, wounds are thoroughly cleaned to remove the source of the toxin-producing bacteria.

Currently, antitoxin is not routinely given for treatment of infant botulism.

Source: www.cdc.gov

District Health Department #10

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