



BOTULISM

- What is BOTULISM?** Botulism is a rare muscle-paralyzing illness caused by a toxin produced by soil bacteria. The toxin most commonly produces illness after eating contaminated food. Botulism occurs naturally in three forms in humans: foodborne, wound, and intestinal (in infants or adults). An unnatural, rare form of botulism occurs by inhalation of aerosols that carry the toxin. All forms can be fatal and require prompt medical attention.
- Transmission:** Botulism is not transmitted person to person. The disease occurs by eating contaminated food, when the organism comes in contact with an open wound, or by breathing in airborne droplets.
- Signs and Symptoms:** Symptoms of botulism include double vision, blurred vision, drooping eyelids, dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, slurred speech, and arranging words wrong. Muscle weakness and paralysis occurs, descending from the shoulders down the body. Paralysis of chest muscles can cause a person to stop breathing and die, unless prompt medical attention is provided. Infants with botulism have poor muscle tone, constipation, lack of energy, and a weak cry. Symptoms usually begin within 18-36 hours after eating toxin-containing food.
- Treatment:** Antitoxin prevents patients from worsening if given early in the course of the disease, but recovery may still take many weeks. Patients require intense medical and nursing care, which often includes the use of a breathing machine.
- Diagnosis:** Laboratory tests are available but not required to diagnose botulism. Physicians will consider the diagnosis if the patient's history and physical examination suggest botulism.
- Prevention:** No vaccine is available.
- What can you do?** Avoid feeding honey to infants. Practice careful home canning. Since the toxin is sensitive to heat, cook all food thoroughly.
- Whom do you call?** Division of Public Health: 1-888-295-5156
- For more information:** Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: <https://www.cdc.gov/botulism/index.html>.