



BOTULISM



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

- Food-borne botulism is a serious form of food poisoning that is usually caused by eating food contaminated with a toxin. The toxin affects both the central nervous system and the muscular system. The symptoms usually appear suddenly, 18 to 36 hours (but the range can be anywhere from 2 hours to 1 week) after eating contaminated food. The disorder can affect all ages.
- Infant botulism is a special type that occurs in children less than 12 months of age.
- Wound botulism occurs when the toxin in a wound spreads to other body parts.
- Adult intestinal colonization botulism occurs in older children and adults with colitis who have had recent bowel surgery or have other intestinal conditions.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Blurred or double vision and drooping eyelids.
- Dry mouth.
- Slurred speech.
- Trouble swallowing.
- Vomiting and diarrhea.
- Weakness of the arms and legs. Paralysis.
- No fever.
- No change in mental abilities.

The following symptoms appear in infants:

- Severe constipation.
- Feeble cry.
- Unable to suck.

CAUSES

- A bacterial germ, *Clostridium botulinum* (other types may, rarely, be the cause). The germ may be found in contaminated or incompletely cooked foods. It can also be found in improperly canned foods. The germ generates a strong poison that is absorbed from the digestive tract. The poison spreads to the central nervous system.
- Foods likely to cause botulism include home-canned vegetables and fruits. Also, fish, smoked meats, milk products, and undercooked sausage.
- Honey and corn syrup may cause botulism in infants.
- The bacteria may also contaminate a wound and produce the toxin.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Infants.
- Home-canned foods.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- If a can of food is bulging, don't even open it. If the contents of a can have a strange color or odor, don't even taste the food. Throw it away (safely).
- Don't eat any foods that may not have been properly cooked or canned.
- Don't give infants under 1 year of age honey or corn syrup, not even a small taste.
- Get proper instructions about canning food.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

With prompt treatment, the outlook is good.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Long-lasting weakness.
- Nervous system problems that can last up to a year.
- Lung infections, such as pneumonia.
- Respiratory failure caused by weak breathing muscles. It can lead to death.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnosis and treatment involves emergency hospital care. Blood and stool studies can confirm the diagnosis.
- For food-borne infection, vomiting may be induced, enemas given, or a washing out (lavage) of the stomach may be done to help rid the body of the toxin.
- Wound care will be provided for infected wounds.
- Breathing support with a machine (ventilator) may be needed, along with other supportive-care measures.
- Fluids may be given through a vein (IV) or through a tube placed in the nose (nasogastric).
- Health care providers will report the disease to state or federal health authorities. They will arrange to remove any contaminated food from stores.
- If you suspect botulism, refrigerate some of the contaminated food for testing, if possible.

MEDICATIONS

A special drug (antitoxin) may be given by injection. It can prevent the symptoms from getting worse. It may be lifesaving, but it has serious side effects.

ACTIVITY

Bed rest during treatment. Resume normal activities as your strength permits.

DIET

After treatment, no special diet is needed.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member has symptoms of botulism. Call 911 or an ambulance right away. This is an emergency!

