

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## BOTULISM

Botulism is a rare disease caused by *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria. The bacteria produce a nerve toxin that causes serious illness in humans. Humans can get botulism by eating food contaminated with the toxin or having a wound that is infected with the bacteria. Infants can get sick by swallowing the bacteria, which then grow in the digestive tract. Botulism poisoning is an emergency and requires medical treatment right away.

### Symptoms

Symptoms usually start within 12-36 hours, but sometimes appear up to 10 days later. They include:

- blurred vision or seeing double
- dry mouth
- muscle weakness or limpness that starts in the face and moves downward through the body
- difficulty swallowing
- difficulty breathing
- vomiting
- constipation or diarrhea
- If the ill person is an infant, the child may be weak, floppy, and constipated.
- Botulism can cause death, because the muscles used for breathing stop working.

### Transmission

- *Clostridium botulinum* spores (eggs) are common in soil and on plants, including fruits and vegetables. They can begin to multiply in an environment that protects them from air.
- Home canned vegetables and fruits are the most common source of botulism. Toxins are formed when canned foods are not heated to a high enough temperature to kill bacteria.
- Honey often has botulism spores in it. Infants are especially vulnerable to botulism from honey.
- Bacteria can grow in open wounds and cause botulism.

### Treatment

- Botulism requires immediate medical attention.
- A doctor may do brain and nerve scans and test blood, wounds, or stool (poop) for botulism.
- A medicine called anti-toxin is used to treat botulism.
- Some people may need a breathing machine if their breathing muscles become paralyzed.

### Prevention

- Follow proper home canning techniques (use the recommended time, pressure, and temperature).
- Never eat food from cans that are bulging, dented, or leaking. Throw food out if it has a strange smell.
- Do not feed honey or honey-water to infants less than one-year of age.
- Seek medical care for any wounds. Do not inject street drugs.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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