



What is botulism?

Botulism is a rare but serious illness caused by a nerve toxin that is produced by a type of bacteria called *Clostridium botulinum*. The bacteria can be found in the soil and grows best in low oxygen. There are three main types of botulism: foodborne, infant, and wound. In the United States, an average of 145 cases of botulism are reported each year. Of these, about 15% are foodborne, 65% are infant botulism, and 20% are wound botulism. Botulism is a rare disease in Oklahoma; only two foodborne and four infant cases have been reported since 1994.

How is botulism spread?

Botulism is not spread person-to-person. Most foodborne botulism cases are the result of foods that have not been canned at home correctly. Outbreaks of botulism involving two or more persons have also occurred from poorly preserved food sources such as chopped garlic in oil, chili peppers, tomatoes, etc. Wound botulism often results from soil or gravel that gets into open wounds or fractures or also among injection drug users.

Infant botulism occurs when babies eat foods, such as honey, that are contaminated with spores.

What are the symptoms of botulism?

Classic symptoms of botulism include double/blurred vision, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth, and muscle weakness. Infants with botulism appear very weak and tired, do not want to eat, have a weak cry, neck weakness, poor muscle tone and are usually constipated.

Is there a treatment for botulism?

If diagnosed early, a medication (botulism antitoxin) can be given to the patient to help prevent symptoms from worsening, but recovery still takes many weeks. For more severe or progressed cases that become paralyzed or are unable to breathe on their own will require long-term medical and nursing care.

What can be done to prevent botulism?

1. Follow safe home canning steps:

- A. Carefully select and wash fresh food
- B. Peel some fresh foods
- C. Hot pack many foods
- D. Add acids (lemon juice or vinegar) to some foods
- E. Use acceptable jars and self-sealing lids
- F. Process jars in a boiling-water or pressure canner for the correct period of time

{More details can be found: http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html.}

2. Persons who eat home-canned foods should boil the food for at least ten minutes before eating.

3. Commercial or home-canned products that are bulging or rusted around the rim or seam should not be eaten.

4. Oils that are infused with garlic or herbs should be refrigerated.

5. When pickling, food items should be washed and cooked adequately. Utensils, containers, and other surfaces in contact with food should be cleaned thoroughly with soap and warm water.

6. Honey can contain spores of *Clostridium botulinum* and can be a source of infection for infants. Children less than 12 months of age should not be fed honey. Honey is safe for individuals one year of age and older.