

Botulism

What is it?

- Botulism is a rare but serious paralyzing illness caused by a toxin produced by the bacteria (germ) *Clostridium botulinum*.
- There are 3 main kinds of botulism: foodborne, wound and intestinal (bowel).
- **Foodborne botulism** causes vomiting and/or diarrhea, then is followed by one or more of these symptoms:
 - drooping of eyelids
 - visual changes
 - dilated pupils
 - dry mouth
 - difficulty speaking
 - paralysis
 - constipation
- **Wound botulism** symptoms are like foodborne symptoms except there is no vomiting or diarrhea.
- **Intestinal (bowel) botulism** symptoms include constipation followed by:
 - lethargy (very tired, floppy)
 - poor feeding
 - difficulty swallowing
 - weakness
 - drooping of eyelids

It affects mostly infants under one year of age, but can affect adults who have had gastrointestinal (stomach) problems.

How is it spread?

- **Foodborne botulism** is caused by eating food contaminated with the *Clostridium botulinum* spore. Symptoms begin about 12 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food but can take up to 10 days to appear.
- **Wound botulism** is caused from contamination of wounds by soil or gravel, or injection of street drugs. Symptoms take about 10 days to appear.
- **Intestinal botulism** results from ingestion of *Clostridium botulinum* spores that then grow in the intestine. It is unknown how long it takes for symptoms to appear.

Is there treatment for it?

- Blood and stool (poop) samples are taken to look for the Clostridium botulinum toxin.
- Antitoxin may be used to stop the action of the toxin in the blood.
- Severe symptoms such as breathing problems may need to be treated in the hospital.

What can be done to prevent the spread of it?

- Food safety! Use good food preparation practices and hygiene.

For more information visit:

Public Health Agency of Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/publichealth/services/diseases/botulism.html>

Adherence to Infection Prevention and Control measures by staff and visitors is required to prevent spread of the infection.

**Stop the spread of germs and infection.
Clean your hands.**



This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask Infection Prevention & Control or your health care provider.