



Diseases Fact Sheet - Botulism

South Dakota Department of Health

Office of Disease Prevention Services - 605-773-3737 -(1-800-592-1861 in South Dakota only)

This material is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical care. We are not able to answer personal medical questions. Please see your health care provider concerning appropriate care, treatment or other medical advice.

What is it?

Botulism is a rare but serious food poisoning caused by a toxin produced by the bacteria, *Clostridium botulinum*.

What causes botulism?

Food-borne botulism is caused by eating a food containing the toxin. It often involves improperly processed home-canned foods. Botulism in infants under one year of age has been associated with eating of contaminated honey.

How is botulism spread?

Person to person spread does not occur. A person must eat contaminated food that has not been properly cooked or reheated after the toxin has been produced by the bacteria. With infant botulism, an infant must eat bacterial spores, which then produce the toxin in his/her gastrointestinal tract.

What are the symptoms of botulism?

Food-borne and infant botulism produce symptoms that affect the nervous system. The symptoms include blurred or double vision, general weakness, poor reflexes, dizziness, dry mouth, slurred speech and difficulty swallowing.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of food-borne botulism usually appear 12-36 hours after ingestion but may take several days. The incubation period for infant botulism is unknown.

What is the treatment for botulism?

Hospital care is necessary. Antitoxin can be helpful if given soon after symptoms begin. Antitoxin is not recommended for infants.

What happens if botulism is not treated?



SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY

Environmental Health Testing | Forensic Chemistry | Medical Microbiology

Untreated botulism may result in death.

How can botulism be prevented?

Identified sources of infant botulism, such as honey, should not be fed to infants. All canned and preserved foods should be properly processed and prepared. In addition, because botulism toxin is destroyed by boiling for 10 minutes, people who eat home-canned foods should consider boiling the food before eating it to ensure safety. Bulging containers should not be opened and foods with off-odors should not be eaten or even tasted. Commercial cans with bulging should be returned unopened to the vendor.

Related Sites:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [FoodSafety.gov — Botulism information](#)