



**Central Michigan District Health Department**  
***"Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities"***

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[www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org)

## **BOTULISM**

### **What is Botulism?**

Botulism is a muscle-paralyzing disease caused by a toxin made by bacteria.

There are three main kinds of botulism:

- **Foodborne** botulism occurs when a person eats contaminated food that leads to illness within a few hours to days. Food borne botulism is a public health emergency because the contaminated food may still be available to other persons besides the patient.
- **Infant** botulism occurs in a small number of susceptible infants each year who harbor these bacteria in their intestinal tract.
- **Wound** botulism occurs when wounds are infected with bacteria that secrete toxins.

Botulism is not spread from one person to another. Foodborne botulism can occur in all age groups.

### **How do you get it?**

Infants (under one year of age) can obtain botulism from eating honey. Children and adults can get botulism from eating foods processed in unsafe ways, either at home or in restaurants.

### **Symptoms**

Adults with botulism:

- |                  |                         |                    |
|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| • Double vision  | • Difficulty swallowing | • Drooping eyelids |
| • Blurred vision | • Dry mouth             | • Muscle weakness  |
| • Slurred speech | • Difficulty breathing  |                    |

Infants with botulism:

- |             |                    |               |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------|
| • Lethargic | • Feed poorly      | • Constipated |
| • Weak cry  | • Poor muscle tone |               |

If untreated, these symptoms may progress to cause paralysis of the arms, legs, trunk and respiratory muscles. In food borne botulism, symptoms generally begin 18 to 36 hours after eating a contaminated food, but they can occur as early as 6 hours or as late as 10 days.

### **Treatment for Botulism**

If diagnosed early, food borne and wound botulism can be treated with medicine. This can prevent patients from worsening, but recovery still takes many weeks. Wounds should be treated, usually surgically, to remove the bacteria.

Source: Centers for Disease Control Website: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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