

Infection Prevention and You



Foodborne botulism

The summer season brings with it many things like graduations, parties, and barbecues. Food safety is important for all these gatherings, and typically focuses on food preparation in the home. It is important to follow food safety instructions in the kitchen, while grilling, and home-canning. Botulism has no smell or taste, so it is hard to detect, but it can be deadly. Therefore, it is important to learn how to prevent this foodborne illness.

What is botulism?

Botulism is a serious illness caused by a toxin that stops the body's control of muscle movement, including the muscles that help you breathe. The toxin is made when the botulism bacteria create toxic spores, which are only made under certain conditions, typically from improperly home-canned, preserved, or fermented foods.

There are three different types of botulism: foodborne botulism, infant botulism, and wound botulism.

What are the symptoms of botulism?

According to the CDC, "symptoms of botulism usually start with weakness of the muscles that control the eyes, face, mouth, and throat. This weakness may spread to the neck, arms, torso, and legs. Botulism also can weaken the muscles involved in breathing, which can lead to difficulty breathing and even death."

Additional symptoms of botulism are:

- double vision
- blurred vision
- drooping eyelids
- slurred speech
- difficulty swallowing
- a thick-feeling tongue
- dry mouth
- muscle weakness

If you or someone you know has symptoms of botulism, see your doctor or go to the emergency room immediately!

How is botulism prevented?

When eating out, reduce your risk of foodborne illnesses by checking cleanliness ratings, choosing places that look clean, asking how food is prepared, and avoiding foods that sit out in conditions other than proper temperatures. Be sure to properly handle leftovers as well.

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Prevent foodborne botulism by following safe home canning instructions, performing hand hygiene, and properly washing, cleaning, and sterilizing canning materials.

Infant botulism usually cannot be prevented as the spores occur naturally in soil and dust. The CDC recommends not feeding honey to infants younger than 12 months, as honey can contain these spores.

You can prevent wound botulism by keeping your wounds clean.

Following the above tips and reading the below resources can help protect us while we celebrate together this summer.

Additional resources

- APIC consumer alert—Preventing foodborne illness <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=preventing-foodborne-illness>
- APIC consumer alert—Foodborne illness <https://apic.org/For-Consumers/Monthly-alerts-for-consumers/Article?id=foodborne-illness>
- The CDC—Botulism <https://www.cdc.gov/botulism/index.html>
- The CDC—Prevention (Botulism) <https://www.cdc.gov/botulism/prevention.html>
- The CDC—Protect yourself when eating out <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/eatingout.html>
- FoodSafety.gov—Botulism <https://www.foodsafety.gov/poisoning/causes/bacteriaviruses/botulism/index.html>

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