



Botulism Fact Sheet

Epidemiology Program

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What is Botulism?

It is a muscle-paralyzing disease caused by a toxin. There are three main kinds of botulism. Foodborne botulism is the most common and is caused by eating foods that contain the botulism toxin. It can be especially dangerous because eating contaminated food can poison many people.

What are the symptoms of Botulism?

With foodborne botulism, symptoms begin within 6 hours to 2 weeks (most commonly between 12 and 36 hours) after eating botulism-containing food. Symptoms of botulism include double vision, blurred vision, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth, muscle weakness that always descends through the body: first shoulders are affected, then upper arms, lower arms, thighs, calves, etc. Paralysis of breathing muscles can cause a person to stop breathing. Botulism is not spread from one person to another.

Is there a treatment for Botulism?

Early administration of antitoxin may prevent or decrease the spread of disease. Some cases may require a stay in the hospital.

Is Botulism vaccine available?

The vaccine is not recommended for the general public or health care providers.