

BOTULISM

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According to the CDC 110 cases of botulism are reported each year. 25% are foodborne, 72% are infant botulism and 3% are wound botulism.

What are the symptoms of botulism?

Symptoms usually appear 6 hours to 2 weeks after eating food contaminated with botulism. Symptoms include blurred vision, double vision, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth and muscle weakness. Infants with botulism are lethargic, feed poorly, are constipated and have a weak cry with poor muscle tone. If left untreated symptoms may progress to cause paralysis of the arms, legs, trunk and respiratory muscles, which can lead to death from respiratory failure. With foodborne botulism symptoms usually appear 18 – 36 hours after eating a contaminated food. If you feel that you may have contracted botulism you should seek medical attention.

How can botulism be prevented?

Foodborne botulism is generally associated from home-canned foods with low acid content such as asparagus, green beans, beets, corn and home-canned or fermented fish. Persons who home-can should follow strict hygienic procedures. Botulism is destroyed by high temperatures, therefore if you eat home-canned foods you should boil the food for 10 minutes before eating it. Instructions on home-canning can be obtained from your county extension office or from the USDA.

Foodborne botulism can also occur in unusual sources such as chopped garlic in oil, chile peppers and tomatoes. Oils infused with garlic or herbs should be refrigerated.

Improperly handled baked potatoes wrapped in aluminum foil can also contain botulism. Potatoes which have been baked while wrapped in aluminum foil should be kept hot until served or refrigerated.

Honey can contain botulism spores and has been a source of botulism infection in infants. Children less than one year of age should not be fed honey.

My favorite tip regarding food is, "When in doubt, throw it out!"

Information for this article was obtained at www.cdc.gov.