



FACT SHEET

Botulism

What is it?

Botulism is a poisoning from eating a toxin formed in food contamination with the spores of a bacteria called *Clostridium botulinum*. These spores are widespread in the environment, but are harmless when oxygen is present. They may produce the toxin if the are an environment that contains no oxygen, such as inside a can or jar of improperly canned food.

Symptoms

Symptoms start 12-36 hours and sometimes several days after eating a contaminated food and include:

- Blurred vision
- Dry mouth
- Paralysis of the muscles, especially those muscles that control the face, swallowing, and breathing.
- Vomiting
- Constipation or diarrhea.

How is it spread?

- *Clostridium botulinum* spores are common in the soil and can often be found on agricultural products.
- Poorly prepared, home canned vegetables and fruits are the most common source. Toxins are formed when foods are inadequately heated during canning.

- Illnesses have also occurred with commercial products such as potpies, baked potatoes, and sautéed onions and cured foods in airtight packaging.
- Honey can be a source of botulism for infants because honey often contains *Clostridium botulinum* spores.

Diagnosis and Treatment

- The bacteria can be cultured from the stool (feces), but diagnosis is usually made by indentifying the toxin in blood, stool or suspected food.
- Requires immediate medical attention.

Prevention

- Follow proper home canning techniques (the time, pressure, and temperature required to destroy spores).
- Never eat food from damaged cans (food cans with slits, holes, dents or bulges).
- Do not feed honey or honey-water to infants.

Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-212-6520