

# Botulism

## FACT SHEET

### What is Botulism?

Botulism is caused by a toxin (poison) produced by bacteria called *Clostridium botulinum*. There are three types of botulism:

- Food-borne and intestinal (or infant) botulism are caused by eating contaminated food.
- Wound botulism is often caused by contamination of an open wound with soil or gravel. It has also been reported among injection drug users.

### Who Can Get Botulism?

Most cases of botulism are due to eating foods that have been improperly cooked or reheated. Improperly processed home canned foods are a common cause of food-borne botulism. Botulism is not spread from person to person. Intestinal (or infant) botulism has been associated with eating contaminated honey and corn syrup.

### What are the Symptoms?

Symptoms of food-borne botulism usually occur within 12-36 hours of eating the contaminated food, but may take several days. The time for symptoms to appear for intestinal (infant) botulism is unknown. Early symptoms of botulism include:

- Blurred or double vision.
- Weakness.
- Poor reflexes.
- Difficulty in swallowing or speaking.
- Shortness of breath.

The illness can progress to complete paralysis, respiratory failure and death.

### What is the Treatment?

Treatment for both adults and infants requires hospital care. Botulism antitoxin is given in some cases to adults, but not to infants. Untreated botulism can result in death.

### How Can You Prevent Botulism?

- All home canned products should be properly prepared.
- Infants less than one year old should not be fed honey or corn syrup.
- Bulging food containers should not be opened, and should be returned to the store.
- Foods with unusual odours or appearance should not be eaten or even tasted