

# Botulism



## WHAT IS BOTULISM?

“Botulism” is a very rare, but very serious, paralytic illness. Strains of bacterium *Clostridium Botulinum*, *Clostridium Butyricum*, and *Clostridium Baratii* produce a toxin that disrupts the proper functioning of the nerves. Foodborne botulism occurs when an individual ingests food that contains the toxin, and illness can arise by ingesting a very small amount. Approximately 145 cases of botulism food poisoning are reported each year in the United States, and though botulism can be contracted in other ways, about 15% of the yearly reported cases are foodborne.



## HOW IS BOTULISM CONTRACTED?

Because the bacteria grow best in conditions where oxygen is low, illness usually arises from ingesting food products that were improperly canned. Generally, home-canned foods are the culprit, where a preparer did not follow proper canning procedures. Though very rare – usually once in a decade – contamination can occur in large manufacturing processes, triggering outbreaks. Such outbreaks have originated from foods such as canned cheese sauce, peppers, tomatoes, and carrot juice.



## RECOVERY AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Botulism food poisoning can prove fatal. Contraction should be considered a medical emergency. When an outbreak is identified – when multiple people become infected by a contaminated food product – it is considered a public health emergency. Any person who believes that he or she may be suffering from the symptoms of botulism should seek immediate medical attention. If botulism goes untreated, symptoms can progress rapidly to cause paralysis of the entire body, including paralysis of the respiratory muscles, creating a life-threatening emergency. Though only a small percentage of cases (3% – 5%) result in death per year, many of those deaths are attributed to respiratory failure due to the toxin-induced paralysis of the respiratory muscles.



## SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of botulism food poisoning include blurry vision, double vision, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing or breathing, nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps, dry mouth, drooping eyelids, weakness of the body’s muscles, and ultimately, total paralysis. Symptoms arise rapidly, about eighteen to thirty-six hours following the ingestion of contaminated food. However, in some cases, symptoms can arise as early as six hours or as late as ten days after ingestion.



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