

# Loss Control



FARMERS

## Information Bulletin

### Botulism

Botulism is a rare but serious illness caused by botulinum toxin (poison) produced by *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria. This toxin affects the nerves and if untreated, can cause paralysis and respiratory failure. U.S. health care providers report an average of 110 cases of food, infant, and wound botulism to CDC each year. About 10 to 30 outbreaks of foodborne botulism are reported every year. Although this illness does not occur frequently, it can be fatal if not treated quickly and properly.

#### How is *C. botulinum* transmitted?

Often, cases of foodborne botulism come from home canned foods with low acid content, such as asparagus, green beans, beets, and corn. *C. botulinum* is anaerobic, which means it can survive and grow with little or no oxygen. Therefore, it can survive very well in sealed containers. Outbreaks of the infection, however, are often from more unusual sources such as chili peppers, tomatoes, and improperly handled baked potatoes wrapped in aluminum foil.

#### What are the symptoms of food borne botulism?

- *Double vision and drooping eyelids*
- *Slurred speech*
- *Dry mouth and difficulty swallowing*
- *Weak muscles*

Symptoms of foodborne botulism usually begin within 18 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food, but can occur in as few as six hours or as much as ten days afterward.

#### How is it diagnosed?

A health care provider can use laboratory tests to identify *C. botulinum* toxin in the blood or stool of an infected person.

Some ways to prevent foodborne botulism.

- *Follow strict hygienic steps when canning foods*
- *Refrigerate oils with garlic or herbs*
- *Keep baked potatoes wrapped in aluminum foil hot until served, or refrigerate them*
- *Consider boiling self canned foods before eating them to kill any bacterial which might lurk in the food*