

# **Botulism Contamination Extended and Short Messages**

## **Health and Safety Information for the First Hours**

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Grade Level: 9.5

## Botulism Contamination Extended Message

### Health and Safety Information for the First Hours

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#### *What is happening?*

- This is an urgent health message from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Please pay careful attention to this message to protect your health and that of others.
- Public health officials have reported *xxx number* cases of botulism in *xxx area*.
- At this time, we do not know the extent or source of the botulism contamination.
- Local, state, and federal officials, including HHS, FBI, and Homeland Security, are working together. Updated announcements will be made as soon as these officials know more.
- Botulism is a rare muscle-paralyzing disease caused by a nerve toxin (poison) produced by bacteria. This disease requires treatment within 24 hours.
- Although rare, people can get sick from naturally occurring botulism after consuming contaminated food or drinks. Botulism does not spread from person to person.
- In the current situation, public health officials are concerned because of the unusually high number of cases. We are also concerned because we don't know yet how these people were exposed to the toxin.
- We have challenges ahead, and we are working to find out more about this outbreak. By staying informed and following instructions from health officials, you can protect yourself, your family, and the community against this public health threat.
- For more information on botulism, visit the HHS Web site at <http://www.hhs.gov>, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) botulism page at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/botulism/#general>, or call the CDC Hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO for the latest information.
- This message contains additional information that can help protect your health and the health of others.

#### *What is botulism?*

- Botulism is caused by a toxin made by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*, which occurs naturally in soil. The toxin restricts a person's movement and breathing by affecting the nervous system.
- The toxin is extremely strong and a small amount can make a person very sick.
- About 110 cases of naturally occurring botulism are reported each year in the United States and are usually caused by consuming improperly preserved home-canned foods or beverages.
- Although difficult, botulism could also be deliberately spread through the air,
- Botulism is not spread from person to person. You cannot get it from breathing the same air as a sick person or from coughing or sneezing. Therefore, people are not in danger of catching botulism from each other.

***What are the symptoms of botulism?***

- Symptoms of botulism include unexplained trouble seeing (double or blurred vision), drooping eyelids, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth, slurred speech, and muscle weakness.
- Symptoms usually appear within 12 to 36 hours after exposure but can take as long as several days to begin.
- If left untreated, botulism can also lead to paralysis, leaving a person unable to move certain muscles, including those that control breathing and movement of arms, legs, and upper body.

***What to do if you have symptoms of botulism***

- If you have symptoms of botulism, get medical attention as soon as possible and within 24 hours of the start of your symptoms.
- Go to the emergency room or immediately call your doctor or local public health department at xxx-xxx-xxxx for instructions on where to get treatment. Getting treatment quickly will increase your chances of recovery.

***How is botulism treated?***

- Getting medical attention as soon as possible and within 24 hours of the start of symptoms increase your chances of recovery.
- Botulism is treated with a medicine called an "antitoxin." This is the only specific treatment for this condition, in addition to intensive medical support. Antitoxin can prevent the symptoms from getting worse, but it cannot cure the illness.
- Recovery from botulism can take weeks or months. If the disease paralyzes muscles involved in breathing, a respirator help the patient breathe during recovery.

***What to do if you are concerned about botulism***

- It is natural to be concerned or afraid at a time like this. Staying informed and following instructions from public health officials will help you stay as safe and healthy as possible.
- If you start to show symptoms, get medical care immediately.
- To avoid getting sick, stay away from the area where officials believe the toxin was released.
- Stay informed by turning to the radio, television, or Internet news for updated health and safety announcements.
- Since we don't know the source of the botulism toxin at this time, follow these safe food handling practices:
  1. Avoid eating foods that may have a strange color, smell, or taste.

2. Boil all liquids, including water and milk, for 5 minutes to destroy the botulism toxin.
3. Cook foods thoroughly for at least 10 minutes to an internal temperature of 185 degrees Fahrenheit. You can check this with a food thermometer.
4. On surfaces where food is placed, botulism toxin can be destroyed with household bleach mixed with water. Use 1 part bleach to every 10 parts water. For example, if you use 10 cups of water, use 1 cup of bleach.

***What is being done and how to get more information***

- Federal, state, and local officials are working together to find and treat people who have symptoms or may have had contact with the botulism toxin. They are also taking actions to prevent others from being exposed.
- Public health officials will share information and give more instructions as the situation develops and they learn more.
- Go to [insert local media information here] to hear the latest information from local officials.
- For more information on botulism, visit the HHS Web site at <http://www.hhs.gov>, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) botulism page at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/botulism/#general>, or call the CDC Hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO for the latest information.

Grade Level: 9.5

## Botulism Contamination Short Message

### Health and Safety Information for the First Hours

- This is an urgent health message from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).
- Public health officials have reported *xxx number* cases of botulism in *xxx area*.
- At this time, we do not know the extent or source of the botulism contamination.
- Local, state and federal officials, including HHS, FBI, and Homeland Security, are working together. Updated announcements will be made as soon as these officials know more.
- Botulism is a serious disease caused by a toxin that attacks the nervous system. People get botulism by consuming contaminated foods or drinks.
- In this situation, public health officials are concerned because of the unusually high number of cases. We are also concerned because we don't know yet how these people were exposed to the toxin.
- Watch for these symptoms: droopy eyelids, blurry vision, slurred speech, trouble swallowing, trouble breathing, and difficulty moving. If you have these symptoms, call your doctor or local health department at *xxx-xxx-xxxx* as soon as possible.
- These symptoms can appear from 6 hours to 2 weeks after exposure.
- Botulism does not spread from person to person; therefore, people who are sick do not need to be isolated.
- To be on the safe side, heat all foods to 185 degrees for at least 10 minutes and boil all liquids.
- We have challenges ahead, and we are working to find out more about this outbreak. By staying informed and following instructions from health officials, you can protect yourself, your family, and the community against this public health threat.
- Go to [insert local media information here] to hear the latest information from local officials.
- For more information on botulism, visit the HHS Web site at <http://www.hhs.gov>, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) botulism page at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/botulism/#general>, or call the CDC Hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO for the latest information.