

# Botulism Antitoxin

## Get protected, get immunized.

- Antitoxins are passive immunization agents. This means they're used to treat some infections, but they don't give long-term protection like vaccines.
- There is no vaccine to prevent botulism.

## What is botulism antitoxin?

Botulism antitoxin is a treatment for botulism caused by *Clostridium botulinum* (*C. botulinum*) bacteria. This treatment is made from horse (equine) blood and stops botulism from getting worse. It is **not** a vaccine.

You can only get botulism antitoxin at a hospital by special order from a doctor.

## What is botulism?

Botulism is a rare, serious illness. *C. botulinum* bacteria is commonly found in soil or dust, animals, and contaminated (unsafe) food.

The bacteria produce a toxin that affects the nervous system. Botulism can cause paralysis.

There are different types of botulism. The type you have depends on how you got botulism, but the cause is not always known.

Symptoms depend on the type of botulism. They can develop within hours or over several days. Symptoms may include:

- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea)
- vomiting (throwing up)
- belly cramps
- diarrhea
- constipation
- dry mouth
- blurred or double vision
- difficulty with speaking and swallowing
- drooping eyelids
- numbness, weakness, and loss of muscle tone in the face, head, throat, chest
- paralysis (unable to move part of your body)

See reverse for more information.

## Who is most at risk?

All people are at risk for botulism. You can get it more than once. Babies are at higher risk because their intestines do not yet have the good bacteria to protect them.

You may be at higher risk if you:

- eat improperly prepared food, including home-canned foods, fermented fish or marine mammal meat, improperly stored low-acid fruit juices, or improperly prepared restaurant food
- use needles to inject drugs

## How does it spread?

Botulism happens when the *C. botulinum* bacteria get into the body. Bacteria can enter the body when things from the environment are eaten or swallowed, through an open cut or wound, or contaminated food.

Botulism does not spread from person to person.

## How can botulism be prevented?

Botulism can be prevented by following safe food practices when handling, preparing, and storing food. Safe food practices are especially important when working with:

- home-canned foods
- oils infused with garlic or herbs
- foods that are sealed and not refrigerated

## Who should get botulism antitoxin?

Botulism antitoxin is a treatment given in hospital if your doctor decides it is needed.

## How many doses of botulism antitoxin do I need?

The dose you need depends on your age and weight. Your doctor will decide what dose you need.

## How well does botulism antitoxin work?

Botulism must be diagnosed and treated quickly with the antitoxin.

Botulism antitoxin can help to stop botulism disease from getting worse.

## Where can I get botulism antitoxin?

You can only get botulism antitoxin at a hospital. Your doctor needs to place a special order for it.

## Are there side effects from botulism antitoxin?

There can be side effects from botulism antitoxin. Side effects may include:

- headache
- fever
- chills
- feeling itchy
- hives
- rash
- general swelling
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea)

At least 1 out of 100 people who got botulism antitoxin reported 1 or more of these side effects. In some cases, it is unknown if botulism antitoxin caused these side effects.

Allergic reactions may occur up to approximately 3 weeks after having botulism antitoxin.

Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction (called anaphylaxis). If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine in the hospital to treat the symptoms.

### How can I manage side effects?

If you need botulism antitoxin, you will have to stay in the hospital. Your doctor will watch you closely and help you manage any side effects.

If a delayed allergic reaction occurs after you leave the hospital, contact your doctor or go to the nearest emergency department right away. Report the reaction to Health Link at 811.

### Who should not get botulism antitoxin?

Anyone who needs botulism antitoxin can have it. But talk to your doctor before getting botulism antitoxin if you have had:

- a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to botulism antitoxin or any of its ingredients
- an allergic reaction to any equine (horse) products

### For more information



Call Health Link at **811**