

## Botulism Immune Globulin (BabyBlg®) Information Sheet

### What is botulism?

Botulism is a rare, serious illness caused by a toxin produced by bacteria called *Clostridium botulinum* (*C. botulinum*). These bacteria are commonly found as spores in soil, water, animals and contaminated food or agricultural products worldwide. The toxin affects the nervous system and can cause paralysis. There are seven types of *C. botulinum* toxin, but most human cases are caused by types A, B and E.

Infant botulism is the most common form of botulism, affecting children under 12 months of age as the normal bowel bacteria in infants are not developed enough to prevent disease.

### How is botulism spread?

Botulism is not spread from person to person. Instead, botulism occurs when the *C. botulinum* spores or the toxins get in to the body through:

- eating food contaminated with toxin (foodborne botulism). Some examples of possible food sources are honey and poorly preserved home-canned foods. Outbreaks have occurred in poorly handled or stored restaurant-prepared food.
- getting spores in an open cut or wound (wound botulism). *C. botulinum* spores are everywhere in soils and dust worldwide.
- breathing in particles of toxin in the air.
- infants under 12 months of age ingesting a substance containing spores (infant botulism). Spores that are ingested (eaten) produce bacteria in the gut which release a toxin. Non-human milk is the most common source for infant botulism, while honey is another potential source. Infant botulism is generally the most common form of botulism, with the majority of cases occurring from 6 weeks to 6 months of age.

### What are the symptoms of botulism?

Symptoms of infant botulism may include:

- constipation initially, followed by
- decreased movement, loss of facial expression, loss of head control
- altered or weak cry
- loss of appetite, poor feeding, weak suck
- drooling
- symptoms that affect the nervous system starting from the head and moving toward the feet.

Symptoms can occur abruptly, within hours or can evolve gradually over several days. Progression of symptoms is more severe in infants that are younger than 2 months of age. Fever is not typically present.

### How can botulism be prevented?

Botulism can be prevented by good hygiene practices and by proper storage and preparation of infant food such as infant non-human milk sources, as well as by ensuring infants do not ingest any foods at risk of contamination, such as honey.

### What is botulism immune globulin (BabyBlg®)?

Botulism immune globulin (BabyBlg®) is a sterilized blood product that contains human antibodies against botulinum toxin. Antibodies are substances in the blood created to fight infections.

### **Is botulism immune globulin safe?**

BabyB1g® is carefully screened and treated to eliminate any other germs. It does not contain any preservatives. As with any treatment there are potential side effects, however the risks of illness outweigh the risks of these potential side effects.

### **Who should get botulism immune globulin?**

BabyB1g® is given to an infant once a diagnosis of infant botulism caused by toxin types A or B is made. The attending physician must access the BabyBIG® through the Medical Officer of Health.

### **Who should not have botulism immune globulin?**

BabyB1g® is vital for the treatment of infant botulism. BabyB1g® should be used with caution in individuals with any of the following:

- a history of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to an immune globulin or any of its components
- an unusually severe reaction to an immune globulin in the past
- isolated IgA deficiency

### **What are the possible side effects to botulism immune globulin?**

Most common reaction is mild and transient red rash on the face or trunk.

The passive transfer of antibodies may interfere with the response to live viral vaccines. Talk to your public health nurse or health care provider for more information.

### **What should you do if you have a reaction to botulism immune globulin?**

Infants receiving BabyB1g® would be hospitalized and under the direct care of a physician where reactions to this product would be monitored.

For health advice and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call **Health Link Alberta** at:

- 403-943-5465 in Calgary
- 780-408-5465 in Edmonton
- Toll free 1-866-408-5465 elsewhere in Alberta

Or visit [www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca](http://www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca) for health information online.

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