

Surveillance Alert – Two Confirmed Cases of Botulism in Ontario

There are two confirmed cases of botulism in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Both individuals are currently hospitalized and have received anti-toxin. The possibility exists that the two cases have intestinal colonization botulism, which is rare in adults. Toronto Public Health is working with other Public Health units and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to investigate possible sources for these cases.

Botulism is a rare toxin-mediated illness caused by *Clostridium botulinum*. The toxin is a potent poison that can lead to serious illness, and must be treated early. Symptoms generally begin 12 to 36 hours after eating a contaminated food, but they can occur as early as six hours or as late as 10 days after food consumption.

Initial symptoms of food borne botulism may include vomiting and/or diarrhea followed by one or more of: ptosis, visual disturbance, dilated and fixed pupils, dysphagia, dry mouth and dysphonia. Symptoms may extend to a descending symmetrical flaccid paralysis in an alert afebrile person. Paralysis is caused by blockage of neurotransmission at the voluntary and autonomic neuromuscular junction. Constipation is a common symptom later in the presentation.

If botulism is suspected, botulism antitoxin should be given as soon as possible but will not reverse flaccid paralysis once it occurs. If indicated, attempts may be made to remove contaminated food still in the gut by inducing vomiting or by using enemas.

Suitable clinical specimens for botulism testing include: fecal samples (approximately 10 g) or enema fluid, gastric contents (which are best adjusted to approximately a pH of 6.0) and serum (from 20 ml of blood collected before administration of antitoxin in a red topped tube). Specimens are tested at the National Botulism Reference Laboratory in Ottawa.

Please report anyone with signs and symptoms of possible botulism to Toronto Public Health immediately at 416-392-7411 (or 416-690-2142 after hours). Toronto Public Health will facilitate testing and access to antitoxin.

Additional information can be found in the Botulism Fact Sheet for Health Professionals at the following URL:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/pub/disease/factsheet/hcp_botulism.pdf