

## **Information for Persons Who May Have Been Exposed to Botulism (Clostridium botulinum toxin)**

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### **What is Botulism?**

Botulism is a paralyzing illness caused by a nerve toxin, produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*

Botulism usually occurs in three forms:

- Wound (skin) botulism is a rare disease occurring when *C. botulinum* spores contaminate a wound and produce toxin
- Intestinal botulism is most commonly seen in infants and results from intestinal colonization with *C. botulinum* spores
- Foodborne botulism is caused by the ingestion of botulinum toxin in contaminated food

A person can be exposed by breathing in the toxin if it is intentionally released into the air. This does not occur naturally.

### **How likely is it that I have actually been exposed to botulinum toxin?**

That depends on how the toxin was released. In the event of an aerosol exposure, where the toxin was released and where you were relative to the release site will be important determinants of your exposure. If the toxin was put into food or water, exposure will depend on the quantity and types of food you ate. As part of the investigation about the current situation, someone may be interviewing you or providing you with additional information to help determine your likelihood of exposure.

### **How do I know if I need any treatment now?**

You will need treatment only if you begin to develop any of the symptoms below. In the event that you develop symptoms, treatment is available.

### **You should watch for the following symptoms for at least 7-10 days:**

- Blurred or double vision
- Dry mouth
- Difficulty swallowing
- Slurred speech
- Weakness or paralysis

Contact your health care provider immediately if you develop any of these symptoms

Even if it was determined that you were not likely to have been exposed you should still watch for the above symptoms and contact health authorities if you develop them.

**Do I need to worry about being contagious to others?**

Botulism does NOT spread from person to person. Even if you develop symptoms of botulism, you are NOT contagious to other persons.

**For further information, contact the Preventive Medicine Department at 953-8809/8810. Report all suspected cases to this number.**