

# ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## NEWS RELEASE

Residents should take protective actions because of botulism outbreak

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health has been advised that an outbreak of botulism has occurred in \_\_\_\_\_ (list affected areas). Residents of these areas are encouraged to take protective action to prevent exposure, seek medical attention to prevent exposure, and seek medical attention if they have been exposed.

Botulism is a muscle-paralyzing disease caused by a toxin made by a bacterium called *Clostridium botulinum*. Botulism is not spread from person to person. It can be spread via air, food or water depending on the type of disease.

- Foodborne – this is caused by eating improperly preserved or cooked food; or by improper canning or cooking of food.
- Infant – occurs when a large amount of the spore is ingested through food products, such as honey and corn syrup, normally tolerated by adults.
- Wound – a rare instance in which wounds are infected with *C. botulinum*. This illness is usually found in injection drug users.
- Inhalation – there have only been three cases of this form of the disease which occurred as a result of a laboratory incident. It is caused when people inhaled refined botulinum toxin disseminated through air.

“We want people who are in the affected areas to take this threat seriously and take precautions to limit exposure to themselves and others,” said \_\_\_\_\_ (Public Health spokesperson). “We also want those who have been exposed to take measures to prevent serious harm and to seek medical attention immediately if they have symptoms.”

Symptoms generally occur within 12-36 hours, but can occur as soon as 6 hours after eating contaminated food. Symptoms include blurred vision, slurred speech, drooping eyelids, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth and muscle weakness that descends

through the body, predominantly affecting the nervous system. Within hours, facial paralysis begins and spreads to the rest of the body affecting breathing muscles that can cause a person to stop breathing and die.

Prompt medical attention is the key to successful treatment of botulism. However, because botulism is rare, it is often difficult for physicians to diagnose.

Botulism antitoxin is the medicine prescribed to treat botulism and can be very effective. It reduces the spread of paralysis but will not reverse paralysis if it has already set in, so early treatment is critical. In severe cases, patients may need long-term care including a ventilator to help assist breathing.

The department has scheduled a point of dispensing site at \_\_\_\_\_ (location – city) from \_\_\_\_\_ (time) to dispense \_\_\_\_\_ (medication). The \_\_\_\_\_ (medication) will be designated for the following priority groups:

- Priority group
- Priority group
- Priority group

Stay tuned to your local radio or television stations for more information, developments or changes in the situation. For more information on biological agents, please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).