

Date: 15 May 2017
To: Health Care Providers
From: Alvaro Garza, MD, MPH, Health Officer

Please distribute to all providers and relevant medical staff in your office.

Health Advisory - Update

Botulism in San Joaquin County

Situation:

San Joaquin County Public Health Services (PHS) is collaborating with neighboring counties and the California Department of Public Health in investigating a cluster of hospitalized patients with foodborne botulism. Three patients are San Joaquin County residents. The likely food source has been determined (lab: presumptive positive) to be cheese sauce on nachos bought at the Valley Oak Food and Fuel gas station in Walnut Grove up to afternoon of Friday, 5 May 2017. Additional cases from this exposure may still present through Friday, 19 May.

ACTIONS REQUESTED OF CLINICIANS:

Suspect botulism if a patient presents with acute onset of bilateral cranial neuropathies including ptosis, blurred vision, dryness of mouth, dysarthria, dysphonia, difficulty swallowing, and facial weakness, followed by descending weakness including neck weakness, difficulty breathing, trunk and extremity weakness; fever is usually absent. In mild cases, signs and symptoms may be subtle. Ask about recent food consumption and sources.

Report suspected cases immediately by calling the PHS Communicable Disease Program at (209) 468-3822 during business hours Monday through Friday, or (209) 468-6000 after-hours on evenings & weekends.

Background:

Botulism is a serious paralytic illness caused by a nerve toxin produced by *Clostridium botulinum*. Besides the symptoms mentioned above, patients remain alert and responsive with no sensory deficits. Death may occur from respiratory failure, thus immediate medical attention is imperative. If diagnosed early, Botulism can be treated with an antitoxin made from horse serum which blocks the action of toxin circulating in the blood; available only through public health departments. This can prevent patients from worsening but cannot reverse the paralysis. Lab testing, only available through a public health lab, may demonstrate toxin in stool, gastric aspirate or vomitus, wound or serum of patient, or in a suspected food item. Other neurological disorders that may resemble botulism in non-infants include myasthenia gravis and Guillain-Barré syndrome.

Foodborne botulism can represent a major public health threat, because other people may be at risk of poisoning from eating the same contaminated food. Early identification, reporting, investigation, and response can prevent further disease.

Additional Information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/botulism/index.html>

California Department of Public Health: <https://archive.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Botulism.aspx>

PHS Communicable Disease Program at 468-3822.