

Healthy Canadians

Home > Food & nutrition > Food safety

>  Share >  Contrast >  Print

Infant botulism

On this page:

- [What is infant botulism?](#)
- [How is it caused?](#)
- [Symptoms](#)
- [Reduce your risk](#)

What is infant botulism?

Infant botulism is a rare but serious form of food poisoning that can affect babies up to a year old.

In Canada, honey is the only food that has been linked to infant botulism.

You can help [reduce the risk of this disease](#) by only feeding honey to healthy children over one year of age.

How is it caused?

Infant botulism is caused by *Clostridium botulinum* spores, which are sometimes found in both pasteurized and unpasteurized honey. When an infant ingests honey, bacteria from these spores can grow and produce toxins that could lead to paralysis.

Symptoms

Contact your doctor immediately if your baby shows signs of any of the following symptoms of infant botulism:

- is constipated
- has weak muscles
- is too weak to cry or suck as usual
- has a wobbly head because the neck is weak
- lacks facial expression
- has weak arms and legs
- has trouble breathing
- is not able to swallow

Reduce your risk

Do not

- Do not give any type of honey to infants (babies who are less than one year old).
- Never add honey to an infant's food, water, formula, or soother.

Do

- Only give honey to healthy children over one year of age. By this age, children have developed helpful bacteria in their intestines that protect against *Clostridium botulinum* spores. Therefore, their risk of developing infant botulism is very low.



Did you know?

Since the first reported case in 1979, there have been 42 reported cases of infant botulism in Canada. Three of these cases have been linked to the consumption of honey.

Here are other important facts you should know:

- You can't see, smell, or taste botulism. The bacteria and toxins that cause botulism do not change the colour, odour, or taste of food.
- The bacterial spores that cause infant botulism are not easily destroyed by heat (cooking/boiling).

What the Government of Canada does to protect you

The Government of Canada is committed to food safety.

[Health Canada's](#) Botulism Reference Service (BRS) assists physicians and provincial/territorial departments of health to investigate suspected outbreaks of botulism in Canada. The BRS examines suspect foods and lab samples from across the country.

Health Canada also establishes regulations and standards relating to the safety and nutritional quality of foods sold in Canada. Through inspection and enforcement activities, the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) verifies that food sold in Canada meets Health Canada's requirements.

For more information

- [Infant botulism - It's Your Health](#)
- [Food recalls and advisories](#)
- [Food safety tips for home canning](#)
- [Home canning and bottling of seafood](#)
- [Report product-related health and safety concerns](#)
- [Botulism](#)
- [Causes of foodborne illness](#)
- [Food safety facts on botulism](#)
- [Food safety tips](#)

[For industry and professionals](#)

Date modified: 2013-01-08