

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 02/29/2016

TO: Grant County Healthcare Providers
Grant County Media

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT

Heather Massart, Public Information Officer
509-766-7960 ext. 16

Botulism Confirmed in Two Grant County Residents Who Died Earlier this Month

Washington State Public Health Laboratory test confirms.

GRANT COUNTY, WA – The Grant County Health District (GCHD) is working on concluding its investigation of two Grant County residents' deaths that occurred in February 2016. Washington State Public Health Laboratory recently confirmed that one of the submitted specimens was positive for botulism toxin. This information was sufficient to confirm the disease in both cases because they are from the same household with similar classic botulism symptoms. The specific food source has not been confirmed but home-canned or prepared food continues to be suspected as the most likely source. GCHD worked closely with the family to find and properly destroy any unopened home-canned food found in the residence. It is not believed that any of the home-canned food was shared with other households. No other cases of botulism have been reported.

“The thorough work by medical providers and staff at GCHD in coordination with Washington State Department of Health has lead to the confirmation of botulism (botulinum) toxin in the patient's blood samples. This in turn confirmed the clinical suspicion and the results of our environmental investigation,” stated Todd Phillips the Environmental Health Manager at GCHD. Phillips adds “This tragic event is a reminder to all of us about proper food preparation and canning.”

Botulism is rare in Washington State and in Grant County and can occur in any age group. The last case in Grant County was in 2002 and was linked to home-canned green beans. The patient survived. The chance of surviving botulism poisoning depends on the individual's health condition, timely medical care and administration of proper antitoxin. According to CDC, over the past 50 years mortality from botulism has decreased from about 50% to around 3%-5%. As in most cases of food-related poisoning, cases of botulism are largely preventable by proper food preparation and canning. Residents are reminded to review the most current information about home-canning methods prior to each canning event.

Protect yourself from botulism: When in doubt, throw it out!

Home-canned foods could be contaminated but look, smell and taste normal. If there is any doubt about whether safe canning guidelines have been followed, do not eat the food. Home-canned food might be contaminated if:

- The container is leaking, bulging, or swollen
- The container looks damaged, cracked, or abnormal
- The container spurts liquid or foam when opened
- The food is discolored, moldy, or smells bad

To lower your risk of getting botulism from a natural source:

- Store food at the correct temperature. For example, refrigerate food at all times if the package says “Refrigerate” or “Perishable” or if it was refrigerated at the store. Potatoes baked in aluminum foil must either be kept hot or refrigerated.
- Discard foods after the expiration date or if a food can is swollen, rusty, or damaged.
- Follow strict hygienic procedures when you do home canning.

Safe canning practices

- Always use jars approved for canning, such as Mason and Ball, which have been properly cleaned and sanitized.
- Use a new self-sealing lid with each canned jar of food. **(Never use a lid/ seal more than one time.)**
- Lid rings or bands can be reused.
- **Use a pressure canner when canning low-acid vegetables** (like green beans, asparagus, beets, potatoes and corn), meat, fish and poultry. Pressure canning is the only recommended method for canning low-acid vegetables, meat, poultry, and seafood. Do not use boiling water canners because they will not protect against botulism poisoning.

What you need to know about pressure canner canning

A pressure canner is a large, cast-aluminum pot with a locking lid and a pressure gauge. By cooking under pressure, you can increase the temperature of boiling water from 212°F (100°C) up to 240°F (116° C). This is the minimum temperature necessary to destroy botulism bacteria, and the only way to guarantee safe canning for food items such as vegetables, meats and seafood.

- GCHD and WSU Grant-Adams Extension are developing plans for offering lid testing this spring.
- Visit the WSU Food Safety web site for more information on proper home canning methods including a low cost online workshop. <http://ext100.wsu.edu/grant-adams/health/food-preservation-safety>
- Call Margaret Viebrock, Douglas County WSU Extension 509-745-8531 if you have questions about your pressure canner.

What you need to know about water bath canning

The heat is transferred to the food product by the boiling water which completely surrounds the jar and two-piece cap. A temperature of 212° F (100° C) is reached and it must be maintained for the time specified. Always follow a modern recipe with proven and tested processing times. This method is only adequate to kill molds, yeasts, enzymes and some bacteria. **This method never reaches the super-high temperatures needed to kill certain bacterial spores and their toxins, which can produce botulism, therefore, this method cannot be used for processing low-acid foods.**

For more Information about Botulism:

www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/botulism/

www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/EmergencyPreparednessandResponse/Factsheets/Botulism

Home Canning Guidelines:

nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html

Grant-Adams Cooperative Extension Food Safety:

<http://ext100.wsu.edu/grant-adams/health/food-preservation-safety/>

Pressure Canning Questions:

Margaret Viebrock, Douglas County WSU Extension 509-745-8531 or email viebrock@wsu.edu