

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 02/19/2016**

TO: Grant County Healthcare Providers  
Grant County Media

**FOR INFORMATION CONTACT**

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## **Two Deaths in Grant County May Have Been Caused by Botulism**

***Home-Canned Food is the Likely Source.***

GRANT COUNTY, WA – The Grant County Health District (GCHD) is currently investigating two likely botulism cases resulting in two deaths. The suspected source of the botulism was likely home-canned food, however, it is still early in the investigation and the actual source has not been confirmed. “The Health District staff and I are saddened by the deaths and we send our condolences to the family,” states Alexander Brzezny, Grant County Health Officer. He adds, “The family has been very helpful and cooperative during this sad time and we are very appreciative of their help.”

Botulism is rare in Washington State but a very serious illness that can occur in all age groups. Statewide, over the last 10 years, the Washington State Department of Health reported an average of between zero and two cases of food-related botulism each year.

Botulism is a serious, muscle-paralyzing disease caused by a toxin (poisonous substance) made by *Clostridium botulinum*, a bacteria found naturally in the soil. There are three main types of botulism: foodborne, infant, and wound. Historically, home-canned vegetables, fruits and meat products have been the most common cause of foodborne botulism outbreaks in the United States.

**The disease is not spread from person to person.** The amount of exposure to the toxin determines how quickly symptoms appear — **Symptoms generally begin 12 to 36 hours after eating a contaminated food, but they can occur as early as 6 hours or as late as 10 days.** The source of the contaminated food must be identified as quickly as possible to prevent others from becoming ill. **GCHD is still investigating the possible food source that sickened these patients. However, the specific source may not be able to be identified.**

### **What are the symptoms?**

Regardless of how the toxin enters the body, the results are the same. The first symptoms may include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. As the disease progresses, symptoms may include:

- double vision
- blurred vision,
- drooping eyelids,
- slurred speech,
- difficulty swallowing,
- dry mouth,
- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath,
- and muscle weakness.

Finally, if untreated, these symptoms may progress to cause paralysis of the respiratory muscles, arms, legs, and trunk and ultimately death. **If you suspect you are ill, seek medical attention immediately.**

## Treatment for botulism

**Immediate treatment is essential.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention maintains a supply of antitoxin to treat botulism. This antitoxin can only be obtained by healthcare providers from health departments when botulism is suspected or confirmed. The antitoxin reduces the severity of symptoms if it is given early.

### 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

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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/](http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/botulism/)

[www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/EmergencyPreparednessandResponse/Factsheets/Botulism](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/EmergencyPreparednessandResponse/Factsheets/Botulism)

**Home Canning Guidelines:**

[nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications\\_usda.html](http://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](mailto:viebrock@wsu.edu)

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