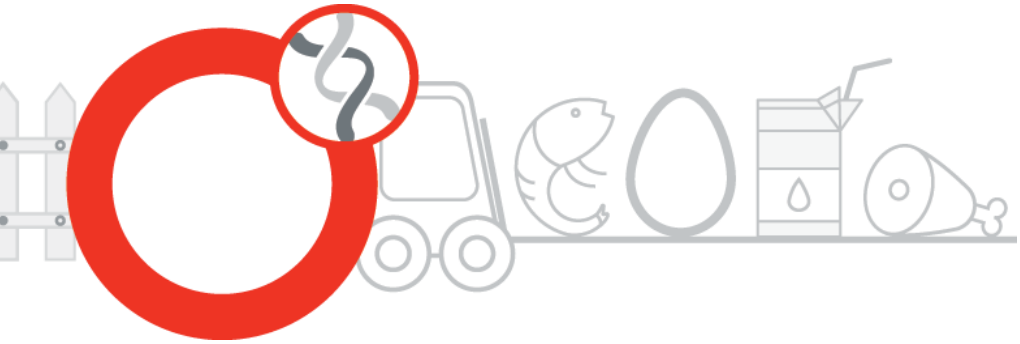

Clostridium botulinum (*C.botulinum)*

What is it?

- Botulism is a paralysing illness caused by a nerve toxin, produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*. The organism is common in the soil and can survive in the form of a resistant spore.
- Spore-forming bacteria are able to survive when there is a lack of food or moisture, or when temperatures are too hot or too cold for them to multiply.

Where is it found?

- *C. botulinum* and its spores are widely distributed in nature and occur in soils and sediments and in the intestinal tracts of fish and mammals.
- The organism can be found in foods that have been incorrectly or minimally processed, including home-canned foods with low acid content, such as asparagus, green beans, beets and corn.
- *C. botulinum* has been identified as a potential hazard in vacuum packed ready-to- eat seafood products.

Why is it a problem?

- Botulism is a rare but serious illness caused by ingestion of the botulinum toxin.
- Symptoms include double vision and drooping eyelids, slurred speech, a dry mouth, difficulty swallowing and weak muscles.
- Symptoms usually begin within 18-36 hours after eating contaminated food.
- If left untreated, botulism can cause paralysis resulting in respiratory difficulties and potentially death.

Who is at risk?

Everyone is susceptible to botulism. Botulinum toxin is one of the most potent toxins known in nature and a very small amount can cause illness.

How can the risk be reduced?

To prevent the growth of *C. botulinum* and toxin production, home canning should follow steps such as:

- applying heat treatments to destroy spores,
- storing product at appropriate temperatures throughout the cold chain,
- acidifying product to inhibit the growth of *C. botulinum*, and
- reducing the amount of water available to the organism by drying product to be preserved.

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