



To: CAHAN San Diego Participants

Date: April 24, 2024

From: Public Health Services

Health Advisory: Botulism-like Illness After Cosmetic Injections

Key Messages

- Botulism-like illness was reported in a resident of San Diego County following the injection of potentially counterfeit botulinum toxin.
- Healthcare providers should immediately report cases of botulism to the County Epidemiology Unit by calling 619-692-8499 (Monday-Friday 8 AM-5 PM) or 858-565-5255 (after hours and holidays).

Situation

The County of San Diego Epidemiology Unit is collaborating with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to investigate a case of botulism-like illness in a San Diego County resident who received injections of suspected counterfeit botulinum toxin. The product was purchased on the internet and administered by an unlicensed individual at a so-called "Botox party." On April 23, 2024, the CDC issued a [Health Advisory](#) regarding adverse reactions among 22 people across 11 states who received injections of botulinum toxin ("Botox") or a similar possibly counterfeit products.

Background

Botulinum toxin is an FDA-approved medication indicated for therapeutic and cosmetic treatments. Botulism-like illness, however, has resulted from the administration of counterfeit products, improper technique, and incorrect dosage.

Botulism is a potentially life-threatening neurotoxin-mediated illness characterized by symmetric descending flaccid paralysis. Paralysis begins with the cranial nerves, typically manifesting as diplopia, ptosis, ocular palsy, dysphagia, or dysphonia, and may progress to extremity weakness and respiratory failure. Botulinum neurotoxin is produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum* or, more rarely, other *Clostridium* species. Exposure to the neurotoxin occurs from the ingestion of toxin (foodborne botulism), colonization of a wound (wound botulism) or the intestines (infant botulism and adult intestinal colonization botulism), or high concentration cosmetic or therapeutic injections of toxin (iatrogenic botulism). Additionally, there are concerns about the possibility of a bioterrorism event involving intentional contamination of food or drink or aerosolization of toxins.

The initial diagnosis of botulism is based on clinical symptoms. Do not wait for laboratory confirmation to initiate treatment. Treatment involves supportive care, intubation and mechanical ventilation when necessary, and administration of botulinum antitoxin.

Actions Requested

- **Consider** botulism in the differential diagnosis of cranial nerve palsies or descending paralysis and ask patients about exposure to botulinum toxin injections. Consult Toxicology, Neurology, and Infectious Disease, as appropriate.
- **Immediately Report** suspected cases of botulism to the County Epidemiology Unit by calling 619-692-8499 (Monday-Friday 8 AM-5 PM) or 858-565-5255 (after hours and holidays). Epidemiology Unit staff can facilitate the release of botulism antitoxin from CDPH.

Resources

Federal

[Health Alert Network \(HAN\) - 00507 | Adverse Effects Linked to Counterfeit or Mishandled Botulinum Toxin Injections \(cdc.gov\)](#)

[Counterfeit Version of Botox Found in Multiple States | FDA Information for Health Professionals | Botulism | CDC](#)

State

[Botulism \(ca.gov\)](#)

Local

[Monthly Communicable Disease Report \(sandiegocounty.gov\)](#)

Thank you for your participation.

CAHAN San Diego

County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency

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