



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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COMMUNICABLE DISEASE UNIT

PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATE

To:	All Healthcare Providers
From:	Arnold S. Leff, MD, REHS, County Public Health Officer
Date:	March 21, 2019
Subject:	Wound Botulism Update (Original alert: 11/16/18)

Local Wound Botulism Update

Current Situation: Recently, a wound botulism patient presented to local emergency departments with a history of injection drug use and symptoms suggestive of botulism (i.e. difficulty swallowing, blurred vision, and general weakness). The patient eventually required prolonged intensive care treatment. The source of the botulism remains unknown and additional cases may occur. Public Health asks that local health care providers be aware of this local case and the overall increase in reported wound botulism cases associated with injection drug use, including several local clusters in California.

Key Messages:

- **Be alert for cases of wound botulism**, especially in persons who inject drugs. Symptoms include altered vision, drooping eyelids, difficulty swallowing, speaking, or breathing, and muscle weakness which can progress to descending paralysis. Symptoms can resemble intoxication or drug overdose. Patients can present with mild symptoms which can progress quickly to respiratory failure. Wound botulism patients do not always present with a visible wound or abscess.
- **Prompt clinical diagnoses is imperative** as timely administration of botulism antitoxin (BAT) can halt the progression of disease, lead to better outcomes, and save lives.
- **Clinicians must immediately report any suspect botulism patients** to the Communicable Disease Unit at **(831) 454-4114**. **After hours call (831) 471-1170** and ask to speak with the Health Officer on call, who will notify the state as necessary.
- State health officials are on call 24/7 to provide technical consultation for botulism testing and BAT release. The decision to administer BAT is based on clinical presentation. **BAT administration should not be withheld pending laboratory confirmation.**
- Clinicians should alert their patients that injecting drugs may increase their risk of botulism as well as hepatitis and HIV. **Persons who inject black tar heroin are especially at risk for wound botulism** and cooking or cleaning drug paraphernalia does not decrease a person's risk.

Additional resources:

- CDPH's "Black Tar Heroin May Cause Botulism" flyers (bilingual versions attached)
- Santa Cruz County Public Health Alert 11/16/18: Wound Botulism in Black Tar Heroin Users http://www.santacruzhealth.org/Portals/7/Pdfs/Alerts/20181116Health%20Alert_WoundBotulism.pdf
- CDC MMWR: Botulism Outbreak Among Persons Who Use Black Tar Heroin — San Diego County, California, 2017–2018 <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm675152a3.htm>
- CDPH Botulism Fact Sheet: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/BotulismFactSheet.pdf%23search=wound%20botulism>
- CDC Botulism: <https://www.cdc.gov/botulism/>

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action



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