

Botulism

By Dr. Karen Becker

Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Becker, and today we're going to discuss botulism. Botulism is a rare but potentially fatal form of poisoning that can result from eating spoiled raw meat, dead animals, or decaying vegetable matter infected with the *Clostridium botulinum* type C neurotoxin. *Clostridium botulinum* is a gram-positive, rod-shaped, anaerobic, spore-forming, motile bacterium with the ability to produce the neurotoxin botulinum. Dogs are generally resistant to the more severe effects of *Clostridium botulinum*, and the disease is almost unheard of in cats.

Symptoms and Diagnosis

Once ingested, it can take from a few hours to a few days for botulism symptoms to appear. The bacteria's neurotoxin causes weakness that begins in an animal's back legs and moves forward into the trunk, neck, and front legs, ultimately causing paralysis of all four limbs. Other signs of botulism include difficulty chewing and swallowing, drooling, vomiting, abdominal pain, and dry eyes.

Your veterinarian will need to know if your pet potentially had contact with spoiled meat or dead animals. He or she will perform a thorough physical exam and order a blood chemistry profile, complete blood count (CBC), and urinalysis. Blood will also be tested for the presence of the *Clostridium botulinum* neurotoxin. A stool or vomit sample may also be taken to check for the toxin. Chest X-rays may be required to check the health of the lungs and the upper gastrointestinal (GI) tract, since botulism intoxication has the potential to paralyze the respiratory muscles.

Treatment

A type C anti-toxin for botulism will be given to neutralize the toxin and prevent further progression of the disease. Additional treatment will depend on the severity of your pet's condition but the homeopathic remedy *Botulinum* can be very beneficial for dogs at this point.

If dogs are only mildly affected, they may still need to be hospitalized for intravenous (IV) fluids and feeding. Severely ill animals that are having difficulty breathing due to paralysis of the respiratory muscles will need to be closely monitored in an intensive care unit (ICU)-type setting. A stomach tube may need to be placed for feeding, and the animal may need to be on a ventilator to assist with breathing in the worst-case scenario.

Complete recovery from botulism intoxication usually takes from one to three weeks. It's important to never allow your pet to eat dead animal carcasses or spoiled raw meat. Some people erroneously believe that because dogs and cats can handle a much higher bacterial load from their food than humans, they can literally eat anything and they'll be fine. But that isn't the case. Pets absolutely can acquire food poisoning. It's never a good idea to feed your pet something that could be spoiled or is left over in the fridge for several weeks. My motto is when it doubt, throw it out.

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