



MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM
Governor

DR. TRACIE C. COLLINS, M.D.
Secretary-Designate

NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN) ALERT

Two Wound Botulism Cases in New Mexico

January 12, 2021

New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) announces two new cases of wound botulism, one confirmed case in a 28-year-old male from Eddy County who injects heroin; and one suspect case in a 29-year-old male from Eddy County who injects heroin and methamphetamine.

Clinicians should be on the alert for cases of wound botulism and report any suspect cases in New Mexico to the Department of Health (24/7/365) at (505) 827-0006. Once alerted to a possible case, NMDOH can facilitate treatment with antitoxin, if indicated.

The suspected source of infection can be a wound at the injection site (which may or may not appear visibly infected), contaminated injection devices, or contaminated drugs. Black tar heroin has been linked to several wound botulism patients in New Mexico over the last several years, but people who inject other illicit drugs are also at risk for wound botulism.

Wound botulism is a rare and potentially fatal paralytic illness caused by a neurotoxin that is produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum* commonly found in soil. These rod-shaped organisms grow best in low oxygen conditions. The bacteria form durable spores which allow them to survive in a dormant state until exposed to conditions that can support their growth.

All providers should maintain a high index of suspicion for wound botulism in any patient presenting with the following signs and symptoms who also reports injection drug use. The classic symptoms of botulism include:

- Double vision
- Blurred vision
- Drooping eyelids
- Slurred speech
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dry mouth
- Muscle weakness/paralysis
- Difficulty breathing/shortness of breath

If untreated, these symptoms may progress to cause paralysis of the respiratory muscles, arms, legs, and trunk and subsequent death. Physicians should consider the diagnosis if the patient's history (i.e., injection drug use) and physical examination suggest botulism. Symptoms of wound botulism can appear similar to opioid overdose.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

1190 St. Francis Dr., Suite N4100 • P.O. Box 26110 • Santa Fe, New Mexico • 87502
(505) 827-2613 • FAX: (505) 827-2530 • www.nmhealth.org

The NMDOH recommends that all clinicians be alert for cases of wound botulism, especially in injection drug users; report any suspect case to the Department of Health 24/7/365 at 505-827-0006 so that antitoxin can be obtained as soon as possible if indicated; and warn persons who inject drugs about wound botulism and inform them of the signs and symptoms and the need to seek medical care immediately.