



BOTULISM SUMMARY, 1995

Two cases of wound botulism were confirmed by laboratory tests in 1995 in persons who self-injected drugs. No foodborne botulism was confirmed.

CASE 1

In September 1995, a 38-year-old White male was evaluated for complaints of double vision, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, and descending muscle weakness. Because of loss of accessible veins, he had recently started "skin-popping" heroin. There was no history of consumption of suspicious foods usually associated with foodborne botulism.

Physical examination revealed an alert, oriented male with a normal sensory examination, ptosis, an absent gag reflex, and chronic abscesses on the hands and arms. Because of progressive respiratory compromise he was intubated and placed on assisted ventilation. Anaerobic cultures of arm lesions found coagulase-negative staphylococci as well as gram-positive and gram-negative rods which were not further identified. Serum obtained prior to botulinal antitoxin administration contained type A botulinal toxin. His stool did not contain botulinal spores. His recovery was uneventful.

CASE 2

A 28-year-old Hispanic male was brought to an emergency room by his family in December 1995 because he could not open his eyes and had lost his ability to speak. He was also having difficulty swallowing and breathing. He had self-injected heroin for five years, but was not known to "skin pop," preferring instead to inject intravenously.

On physical examination there was marked ptosis and muscular weakness that was symmetrical and descending. He required ventilatory support within 12 hours of admission. There were no skin lesions from which to attempt recovery of *C. botulinum*. Serum obtained prior to botulinal antitoxin administration contained type A botulinal toxin. He also recovered completely.

COMMENTS

These two cases of confirmed wound botulism were part of an ongoing California outbreak that started in the late summer. Approximately 25 cases of wound botulism, most of them associated with skin-popping of Mexican "black tar" heroin, were laboratory confirmed. A public alert was issued by the State Department of Health Services. In Los Angeles County, the Acute Communicable Disease Control Unit notified emergency departments and several hundred community service organizations that target injection drug users, including drug treatment programs and AIDS/HIV service and prevention programs.