

Infant Botulism

Honey is a wholesome, healthy product for adults and children, but is not recommended for infants under one year of age. Infants are susceptible to the disease infant botulism which is caused by spores of the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*.

C. botulinum spores are present throughout the environment. The spores are in soil, dust, air, raw agricultural products and finished low acid food products that are not properly processed. Tests on thousands of samples of honey have determined that detectable levels of *C. botulinum* spores have been found in honey. It is extremely difficult to remove bacterial spores from honey without destroying the honey. These spores are routinely consumed without harm by children and adults. They can, however, cause problems in infants because infants lack a fully developed gastrointestinal tract.

Any infant showing symptoms of infant botulism--poor feeding, altered cry, constipation, lethargy--should receive medical attention promptly. Infant botulism can strike even if the infant was not fed honey; indeed, incidents of infant botulism traced to honey are rare. Nonetheless, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Honey Board agree that the honey should not be fed to infants under one year of age.

- o Infant botulism is a form of paralysis that results from the blockage of nerve impulse transmission by the toxin of a microorganism named *Clostridium botulinum*.
- o Infant botulism is a serious disease that may strike some infants under one year of age. After ingestion, *C. botulinum* spores can germinate and grow in the lower bowel of some very young infants.
- o Newborn babies have no intestinal microflora and thus apparently are susceptible to *C. botulinum* infection until their intestinal microflora develop (during the first few months after birth).
- o Healthy children and adults with normal intestinal microflora are resistant to intestinal botulism and are able to ingest botulinum spores without harm.
- o *C. botulinum* spores are widely distributed in nature. They can be found in soil, in dust, in the air, in raw agricultural products and in finished low acid food products which are not properly processed.
- o *C. botulinum* spores have been detected in corn syrup, honey, fresh and processed meats, fruits and vegetables.
- o Symptoms of infant botulism include constipation, weak cry, feeble suck and general muscular weakness. If an infant shows any of these symptoms, he/she should be taken to a doctor immediately.