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## Health Advisory – Wound Botulism December 3, 2020

### **Situation**

Between January 1 and November 16, 2020, there have been 30 patients reported to the CDPH with suspected wound botulism. The median age of patients was 43 years (range 27 to 66 years); 80% were male. All 30 patients were hospitalized; two died. Patients were from 14 local health jurisdictions (LHJs) throughout the state. Recent injection drug use (IDU) prior to illness onset, mostly with black tar heroin, was reported by 30 (100%) of these patients. The number of suspected botulism cases reported in California to date in 2020 is similar to the 31 reported for the same time frame in 2019. However, there have been reports indicating that opiate use and IDU have increased over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, more persons may be at risk of acquiring wound botulism.

In the last three months, Sacramento County had three probable and suspected cases of wound botulism associated with heroin injection. They presented with wound infections or abscesses and a recent history of injecting heroin. Patients were treated with Botulism Antitoxin Heptavalent (BAT®) released by California Department of Public Health. The sources of the heroin remain unknown and additional cases may occur. Treatment will halt progression but not reverse symptoms. Botulism antitoxin treatment does not require laboratory confirmation.

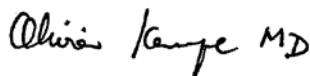
### **Message for Providers**

1. Be alert for suspect cases of wound botulism, especially in injection drug users.
2. Symptoms consistent with botulism include drooping eyelids, blurred or double vision, change in sound of voice, difficulty speaking or swallowing, and trouble breathing.
3. Patients can present with mild symptoms but can also progress rapidly to respiratory failure requiring intubation.
4. Person-to-person transmission does not occur. Standard precautions are indicated.
5. Immediately report suspected cases to Sacramento County Public Health (916-875-5881).

### **Additional Resources:**

- CDPH Botulism webpage  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Botulism.aspx>
- CDC Wound botulism webpage  
<https://www.cdc.gov/botulism/wound-botulism.html>

Sincerely,



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Public Health Officer