

For Health Professionals

Health Alerts

Health Alert #6 - Botulism Alert - 2001

Some sheepshead fish (other common names include: croaker, thunder pumper, lake drum, grunt, bubbler, and grinder) from Lake Erie contain botulism poison. Other fish and waterfowl may be affected too. Advise patients not to eat any fish or waterfowl that act abnormally or seem sick. If dead or dying fish or waterfowl must be handled, gloves or a plastic bag should be used.

The botulism poison can cause illness and death. Symptoms of botulism usually appear 12-36 hours after ingestion but may take several days. Botulism is characterized by acute bilateral cranial nerve impairment and descending weakness or paralysis. Visual difficulty, dysphagia, and dry mouth are often the first complaints. These symptoms may extend to a symmetrical flaccid paralysis in a paradoxically alert person. Vomiting and constipation or diarrhea may be present initially. Fever is absent unless a complicating infection occurs.

For further information call:

State Health Department: 1-800-458-1158

Erie County Health Department: 716-858-6089