

Clostridium botulinum

Clostridium botulinum is an anaerobic bacterium which forms spores and proliferates in decomposing animal tissue and plant material (including animal feeds). Consumption of the toxin causes fatal paralysis. Clinically, flaccid muscle paralysis is the hallmark of this disease. Other clinical signs include disturbed vision, and difficulty in chewing and swallowing. Death is usually due to respiratory or cardiac muscle paralysis.

The most at risk species are ducks and other waterfowl, horses, chickens, and cattle; whereas, pigs, cats and dogs are relatively 'resistant' to botulinum toxins with disease rarely occurring. Outbreaks tend to be more common in warmer months. In NZ, outbreaks have been isolated to waterfowl, with individual cases rarely reported in other species.

As there are no readily available toxin tests in New Zealand, the diagnosis of botulism (*Clostridium botulinum*) is made by eliminating other causes of motor paralysis (flaccid paralysis). Diagnostic testing to rule out other diseases may include CBC or clinical chemistry, necropsy and/or muscle biopsies.

