

Suspected Botulism following Unregulated Cosmetic Injections:

Please distribute to all staff in your facility

- A recent case of suspected iatrogenic botulism has been reported following unregulated cosmetic injections.
- The case required botulinum antitoxin (BAT) and ventilatory support in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).
- There is potential for additional cases due to unregulated activities.
- If concerned that a patient has botulism, contact the NSW Specialist Service for High Consequence Infectious Diseases for advice via the Westmead Hospital Switchboard on 02 8890 5555

Background

- Botulism is a rare but serious illness caused by toxins produced by *Clostridium botulinum*. It can result in flaccid paralysis and requires prompt recognition and management.
- Iatrogenic botulism occurs when botulinum toxin is administered incorrectly, such as through unregulated cosmetic injections.
- Symptoms can appear within a few days to up to two weeks after the cosmetic injection.
- Botulism is initially a clinical diagnosis and is often the only diagnostic approach, as laboratory confirmation can be challenging, not always feasible, and time-consuming.
- Presenting symptoms of botulism may include:
 - Blurred or double vision (diplopia)
 - Drooping eyelids (ptosis)
 - Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
 - Progressive weakness
 - Respiratory distress
- Early treatment with botulism antitoxin (BAT) and supportive care, including ventilatory support if necessary, can be critical for patient outcomes.

Assessment

- There have been at least three reports of suspected botulism symptoms following unregulated cosmetic injections in Australia over the past 12 months.
- Symptoms have ranged from mild to moderate weakness to severe respiratory distress.
- A recent case in NSW required ventilatory support in ICU and administration of BAT.
- Further cases may emerge due to unregulated cosmetic procedures.

Recommendations

- Consider botulism in patients presenting with progressive weakness or paralysis, particularly if cranial nerve involvement is suspected.
- Assess whether the patient has received recent cosmetic injections, especially in unregulated settings.
- If concerned that a patient has botulism, contact the NSW Specialist Service for High Consequence Infectious Diseases for advice via the Westmead Hospital Switchboard on 02 8890 5555

Jeremy McAnulty
Executive Director, Health Protection NSW Health
24 January 2025