

NSW Health

Suspected Botulism following Cosmetic Injections



SAFETY ALERT 001/25

Issue date:	24/01/2025
Content reviewed by:	Health Protection NSW
Distributed to:	Chief Executives; Directors of Clinical Governance; Director, Regulation and Compliance Unit
KEY MESSAGE:	Consider botulism in patients presenting with progressive weakness or paralysis, especially if associated with recent cosmetic injections
ACTION REQUIRED BY:	Clinicians
REQUIRED ACTION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enquire if the patient has had any cosmetic injections recently If botulism is suspected, contact the NSW Specialist Service for High Consequence Infectious Diseases (HCID), available 24 hours on 1800 424 300, to discuss the case and assess the need for botulism antitoxin (BAT).
We recommend you also inform:	Directors, Managers and Staff of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency Departments Intensive Care Units Neurology Services Infectious Disease Services
Website:	https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sabs/Pages/default.aspx http://internal.health.nsw.gov.au/quality/sabs/index.html
Review date:	January 2026

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Situation

- 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.

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 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.
- Early treatment with botulinum antitoxin (BAT) and supportive care, including ventilatory support if necessary, can be critical for patient outcomes.
- Presenting symptoms of botulism may include:
 - Blurred or double vision (diplopia)
 - Drooping eyelids (ptosis)
 - Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
 - Progressive weakness
 - Respiratory distress

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 suspected 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 a patient has botulism, contact the NSW Specialist Service for High Consequence Infectious Diseases, available 24 hours on 1800 424 300, to discuss clinical findings and assess the need for botulinum antitoxin (BAT)