



Central Office: 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT 06109 Phone (860) 721-2822 Fax (860) 721-2823

Berlin: 240 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT 06037 Phone (860) 828-7017 Fax (860) 828-9248

Newington: 131 Cedar Street, Newington, CT 06111 Phone (860) 665-8586 Fax (860) 665-8533

Rocky Hill: 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067 Phone (860) 258-2770 Fax (860) 258-2767

www.ccthd.org

August 1, 2012

Don't Let Home-Canning Make You Sick

The summertime is the optimal time to grow a lush garden full of fresh vegetables just waiting to be cooked and eaten. In fact, food gardening has grown increasingly over the past few years in the United States, with 1 in 5 households canning their own food, 65% canning vegetables. However, while we are enjoying these delicious fruits of our labor, it is important to remember how dangerous canning can be.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), studies show that many home canners are not aware of the risk of botulism, a rare and potentially fatal food borne illness that has been linked to improperly canned food. Botulism is caused by a germ called *Clostridium botulinum*, which is found in the soil and can survive, grow and produce toxin in a sealed jar of food. If consumed, this toxin can cause paralysis, even death.

The most common way to get botulism is through consuming home-canned vegetables. In fact, from 1996-2008, there were 116 outbreaks of food borne botulism reported to the CDC. Of the 48 outbreaks that were caused by home-prepared foods, 18 outbreaks or 38% were from home-canned vegetables. The CDC indicates that botulism usually occurs for the following reasons: home-canners did not follow canning instructions, did not use pressure cookers, ignored signs of food spoilage and were unaware of the risk of botulism from improperly preserving vegetables.

Anyone can be affected from botulism and may experience a variety of symptoms. For adults, the symptoms include:

- Double vision
- Blurred vision
- Drooping eyelids
- Slurred speech
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dry mouth
- Muscle weakness

For infants, the symptoms include:

- Lethargy
- Weakness
- Poor feeding
- Constipation
- Poor head control
- Poor gag and sucking reflex.

To ensure proper food handling and canning practices, be sure to use the right equipment for the kinds of foods you are canning, including a pressure canner or cooker. Be sure the gauge of the pressure canner or cooker is accurate and use up-to-date process times and pressures for the kind of food, the size of the jar and the method of packing food in the jar.

Remember, any food that may be contaminated with the germs that cause botulism should be thrown out immediately. Never taste the product to see if it is safe, especially if the container is leaking, has bulges or is swollen, and also if it looks damaged, cracked or abnormal in any way. Always be sure to fully inspect a jar of commercially and home-canned food thoroughly before cooking or consuming. Do not taste or eat foods that are discolored, moldy or smell bad. Also, do not use products that spurt liquid or foam when the container is opened.

To properly and safely dispose of food and cans that may be contaminated, it is important to consider the following:

- Wear rubber or latex gloves before handling open containers of food that may be contaminated.
- Avoid splashing the contaminated food on your skin
- Place the food or can in a sealable bag, then wrap a plastic bag around the sealable bag
- Tape the bags shut tightly
- Place bags in a trash receptacle for non-recyclable trash outside of the home and out of reach of humans and pets.
- *Don't* discard the food in a sink, garbage disposal or toilet
- Wash your hands with soap and running water for *at least* two minutes after handling food or containers that may be contaminated

Any spills that may have occurred can be cleaned by adding ¼ cup of bleach for each 2 cups of water and completely covering the spill with the bleach solution. From there, add clean towels on top of the bleached area and let them soak for at least 15 minutes. Wipe up any remaining liquid with new paper towels, and clean the area with liquid soap and water to remove the bleach. Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water again for at least 2 minutes. Discard any sponges, cloths, rags, paper towels and gloves that may have come into contact with contaminated food or containers with the food.

For more information about botulism, please contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.cdc.gov and the Food Safety website at www.foodsafety.gov. The Complete USDA Guide to Home Canning is available for print from the CDC website. Any further questions about botulism or any other public health related issue may be directed to the Central Connecticut Health District, serving the towns of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield at (860) 721-2822 or by visiting www.ccthd.org.