pediatric associates
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# Infant Botulism — FAQ for Parents

**What is infant botulism?**
A rare but serious illness caused when *Clostridium botulinum* spores are swallowed, grow in a baby's intestine, and make a toxin that affects nerves and muscle control. Early treatment works very well, so it's important to recognize the signs and call for help if you're worried.

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**Can I give my baby honey?**

- **Do NOT give honey to babies younger than 12 months.** This includes plain honey and foods made with honey (cookies, cereal bars, some baby snacks). The AAP and HealthyChildren.org strongly recommend avoiding honey until after the first birthday.
- **Why not?** Honey can contain microscopic *C. botulinum* spores. An infant's gut (especially under 12 months) is more likely to allow those spores to grow and produce toxin; older children and adults have stronger stomach acid and a more mature gut microbiome that usually stops the spores.
- **After 12 months:** Honey is considered safe once a child is 1 year old. (That's why many guidelines say "no honey until after the first birthday.")

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**My <12 month old just ate a cookie / granola bar / packaged food with honey — what should I do?**

1. **Don't panic.** Most exposures do not automatically cause illness. But you should be cautious.
2. **Call Poison Control (1-800-222-1222)** for advice about monitoring and whether you should bring the baby in. If you still have the package, keep it (or take a photo) so you can show the lot/ingredient label if needed.
3. **Watch closely for symptoms** (see next section). If any symptoms appear, call PAA. If you see poor feeding, very sleepy/floppy behavior, weak cry, breathing trouble, or trouble swallowing — seek emergency care right away or call 911.

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**What do infant botulism symptoms look like — and when do they start?**

- **Early signs (often first):** constipation, poor feeding, decreased interest in feeding. These changes are typically **gradual but clearly different from baseline.** Parents often describe that "something just seems off" or that the baby isn't as strong, alert, or eager to eat as usual.
- **Other signs:** weak or altered cry, sluggish or droopy eyelids, weak head control / floppy muscles, trouble swallowing, less movement, breathing problems. Fever is often **absent**.

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Reference: AAP, HealthyChildren.org, CDC, US FDA

**What do infant botulism symptoms look like — and when do they start?**

- **Timing:** Symptoms can appear **over a range of times** — sometimes within a couple of days, sometimes over several days to weeks after exposure. If a baby eats honey, symptoms are not always immediate; keep watching for a while and follow your clinician's advice.

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**How is infant botulism treated?**

- Treatment is managed in the hospital and may include a medicine called **BabyBIG®** (human botulism immune globulin). Early treatment improves outcomes.

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**What about formula recalls or cases where formula is linked to botulism?**

(Occasionally public health agencies recall a formula if contamination is suspected.)

**If your baby used a recalled formula:**

1. **Stop using the product immediately** and follow recall instructions from the manufacturer/FDA. If you have the package, keep it and note the lot number and where it was purchased.
2. **If your baby is well (no symptoms):** follow guidance from your pediatrician and public health — they may say to watch closely for symptoms. Keep the formula packaging information for health officials if asked.
3. **If your baby shows symptoms** (poor feeding, constipation, weak/"floppy" behavior, trouble breathing, etc.), **seek medical care immediately** and tell the clinicians about the recalled formula exposure. Public health authorities may want to test stool or other samples.

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**Reassurance & quick reminders**

- Infant botulism is **rare**, but safety rules are simple and effective: **no honey (in any form) before 12 months**, keep an eye on your baby if they accidentally ate something with honey, and contact PAA or Poison Control with concerns.

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**Helpful contacts**

- **Poison Control (U.S.): 1-800-222-1222** (available 24/7)
- **Call PAA** if you're unsure or if your baby shows any of the symptoms listed above.
- For public health/recall updates about infant formula: **FDA** and **CDC** websites (they post recall instructions and symptoms to watch for).

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Reference: AAP, HealthyChildren.org, CDC, US FDA