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CATHERINE D. TORRES, M.D., CABINET SECRETARY

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Secretary Catherine Torres, M.D.

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Contact: Aimee Barabe
Cell: 505.470.2290

New Mexico Department of Health Warns of Possible Wound Botulism

The New Mexico Department of Health is cooperating with the Texas Department of State Health Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on an investigation of three patients who are hospitalized in Texas with suspected wound botulism. All three patients are heroin users and the suspected source of infection is contaminated heroin.

Botulism is a rare, but potentially fatal illness caused by a nerve toxin that induces paralysis. Wound botulism is caused by the toxin produced from a wound infected with bacteria called *Clostridium botulinum*.

“All healthcare providers should maintain a high index of suspicion for botulism in any patient presenting with the signs and symptoms suggestive of botulism, particularly if they have a history of injection drug use,” stated Dr. Catherine D. Torres, New Mexico Department of Health Secretary.

Signs and symptoms of botulism include:

- Double vision
- Blurred vision
- Drooping eyelids
- Slurred speech
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dry mouth
- Muscle weakness/descending paralysis
- Difficulty breathing/shortness of breath

If left untreated, these symptoms may progress to cause paralysis of the respiratory muscles, arms, legs, and trunk with subsequent death.

Persons who inject drugs should be aware of the signs and symptoms associated with wound botulism and seek immediate medical attention if they begin to exhibit any symptoms. All clinicians and physicians



Office of the Secretary
1190 St. Francis Drive, N4100 • P.O. Box 26110 Santa Fe, New Mexico • 87502-6110
(505) 827-2613 • FAX: (505) 827-2530 • <http://www.nmhealth.org>

should be on alert for cases of wound botulism, especially if the patient's history (i.e., injection drug use) and physical examination suggest botulism. The New Mexico Department of Health requests that all healthcare providers report any suspect case to the Department of Health (24/7) at (505) 827-0006 so that antitoxin can be obtained as soon as possible if indicated.

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