

An Overview: Botulism

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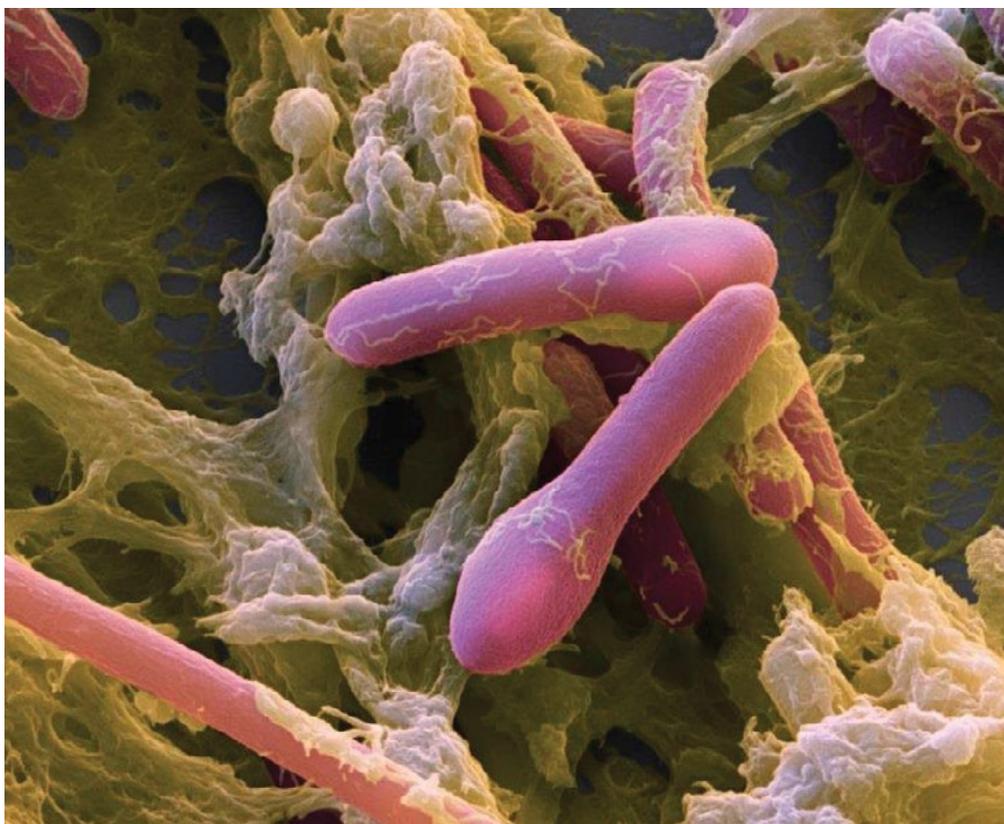


Figure 1: Botulism is a disease caused by a toxin that affects the body's nerves, resulting in breathing problems, muscle paralysis, and even death. *Clostridium botulinum*, *Clostridium butyricum* and *Clostridium baratii* bacteria, contain this toxin. Spores, which serve as protective coatings, are formed by these bacteria and under some circumstances, these spores can expand and produce one of the most lethal toxins ever discovered. Botulism symptoms can occur anywhere from six hours to ten days after the initial infection. Some antitoxin and supportive care which include monitoring of respiratory function is used for treatment. Vaccines are under development, but they have disadvantages, and in some cases there are concerns that they may revert to dangerous native activity. According to the National Institutes of Health, only about 1% of child cases in the US were fatal. Half of all patients with botulism died around 50 years ago, compared to between 3% and 5% today.