

Botulism

Of all domesticated animals, horses are the most sensitive to botulism. While being rare, this is a potentially fatal disease.

Botulism results from the toxins produced by a bug called *Clostridium Botulinum*.

Horses can be get botulism in three different ways:

- Germ growth in the horse's intestine - this affects young foals mainly. These foals are called "shaker foals" because the disease makes them tremble.
- Germ growth into a wound. This occasionally causes botulism in adults but is extremely rare.
- Food or drink that contains the toxin. This way is by far the most common.

The symptoms of botulism are:

- Weakness
- Head held down
- Muscle spasms
- Loss of tail tone
- Walking slowly with a short stride
- Stumbling and inability to stand
- Difficulty eating & drinking
- The tongue may hang from the mouth
- The lips lose their normal tone
- Difficulty swallowing.



A horse with Botulism walking slowly with a short stride & head down

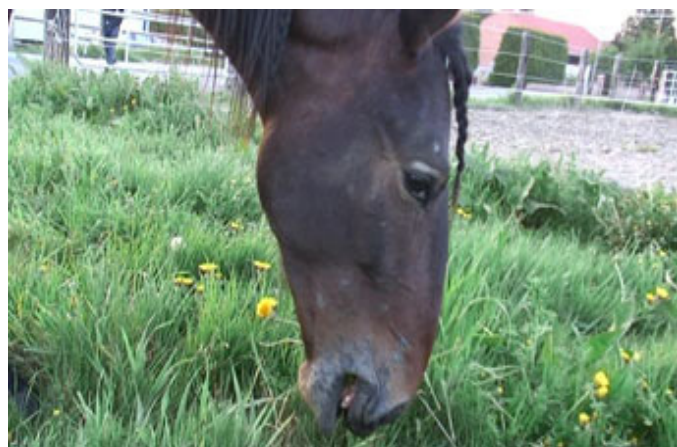
It is important to note that the whole gastro-intestinal tract may be affected by the flaccid paralysis. Therefore choking or colic due to impaction are also seen in association with botulism. All those signs may progress to general flaccid paralysis. In the worst cases, the horse may not be able to stand and usually dies from an inability to breath.

Botulism is difficult to treat but it is possible and with an optimal treatment plan, recovery can be expected within a few weeks. The best treatment is to inject a specific antitoxin serum.

With or without administration of antitoxin serum, supportive treatment may be helpful – some treatments that can be used are:

- Liquid paraffin can be administered to remove any remaining toxins in the guts.
- Food supplementation through a nasal gastric tube.
- Treatment of possible chest infection resulting from aspiration of feeding stuff into the lungs.

Clostridium botulinum, which is the bug producing the toxin, is commonly present in soil and decaying animal carcasses.



Lip lose their normal tone and they have trouble eating and drinking