



## Frozen, Fully-Cooked Products & Botulism - Food Safety Advisory

In August and September 2001, several cases of botulism, a life-threatening illness caused by the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum*, were reported in the United States. Frozen, fully-cooked products were suspected of causing these illnesses. The Food Safety and Inspection Service advises all consumers to handle frozen, fully-cooked products in accordance with these food safety recommendations.

### In the Store

- Before buying frozen, fully-cooked products, carefully inspect the container or package. If the package is punctured, torn, partially opened, or damaged in any other way that might expose the contents to the outside environment, do NOT purchase the product.
- Do not purchase frozen products that appear to have thawed and refrozen.
- Reject all swollen or gassy containers or spoiled foods.
- Buy food from reputable dealers, with a known record of safe handling. Buy frozen products only if they are frozen solid and only if stored in the freezer case.
- Observe any use-by or sell-by dates on the package.

### At Home

- When you open the container, inspect the product. Do not use products that are discolored, moldy, or have an off odor. Do not use products that spurt liquid or foam when the container is opened. **Do not taste the product to determine if it is safe.**
- Follow the preparation instructions on the product label.

### Handling Possibly Contaminated Products

- Report any suspect commercial food products to your local health department. Or call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline (1-800-535-4555; TDD/TTY: 1-800-256-7072) for further instructions.
- If a suspect food is opened in your kitchen, thoroughly scrub the can opener or other utensils, containers, counters, etc., that might have contacted the food or its container. Discard any sponges or cloths used in the cleanup. Wash your hands thoroughly. Promptly launder any clothing that might have been splattered upon.

Botulism is a rare but serious paralytic illness caused by a nerve toxin. Symptoms of botulism include double vision, blurred vision, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth, and muscle weakness. The illness can cause paralysis, respiratory failure and death. Symptoms usually occur from 18 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food. Anyone concerned about an illness should contact a physician.