



Panhandle Health District

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Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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When in Doubt, Throw it Out! Canning Safety Tips

North Idaho Panhandle – Home canning is an excellent way to preserve your garden produce. With more people staying home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, activities such as canning have increased. Before you begin canning, know the risks of botulism from home-canned food and how you can avoid making yourself or others sick.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), foodborne botulism is rare, but can cause serious illness and even death. You cannot see, smell, or taste botulinum toxin, the toxin that causes botulism. Home-canned vegetables are the most common cause of botulism in the United States. Botulism outbreaks have most commonly occurred because home canners did not follow canning instructions, did not use pressure canners, ignored signs of food spoilage, or didn't know they could get botulism from improperly preserving vegetables. Botulism can grow in canned food and cause paralysis or, in some cases, death.

To begin, check the guidance on selecting and preparing the types of fruits or vegetables you plan to can. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has an excellent list ranging from apples and tomatoes to okra and succotash. When grabbing Grandma's canning recipe that has been passed down generations, do a quick check to see if it meets current FDA guidelines. Follow the latest canning instructions. Canning instructions and equipment have changed over the years.

Next, choose the right canner. If you use a pressure cooker make sure it is designed specifically for canning. Check the size because smaller canners can lead to undercooking. The size of your canner, the type of food you are canning, the acid level of the food, and even your altitude- may require you to adjust your canning methods and the time needed in the processor.

Once you've canned your produce, watch for the following and throw it out: If the container is leaking, if it looks damaged, or if the food ends up discolored or moldy. It is not worth getting sick.

Lastly, monitor for any symptoms. The symptoms of botulism may include:

- double vision
- blurred vision
- drooping eyelids
- slurred speech
- difficulty swallowing
- difficulty breathing
- a thick-feeling tongue
- dry mouth
- muscle weakness

Infants with botulism may:

- appear lethargic
- feed poorly
- be constipated
- have a weak cry
- have poor muscle tone (appear "floppy")

It's essential to follow up-to-date, scientifically tested guidelines and recipes. Taking a little bit of extra time to prepare and research safe methods can protect you and your family from getting sick.

Panhandle Health District provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.

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