



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND MENTAL HYGIENE**
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Commissioner

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NYC Health Department Links Fresh Bulk Tofu to Two Reported Cases of Botulism

Non-refrigerated fresh bulk tofu purchased from any New York City market should be disposed of immediately

Botulism is a rare foodborne illness that can be fatal

March 30, 2012 – The New York City Health Department is investigating one confirmed and one suspect case of botulism, a rare but serious foodborne illness caused by an extremely potent toxin. New York City has seen only one other case of foodborne botulism in the past 15 years. Both patients are Chinese-speaking Queens residents and had recently purchased unrefrigerated fresh bulk tofu from the same store in Flushing. The tofu was not made at this store, and its source is still under investigation. This kind of tofu—commonly sold in an open, water-filled bin—is highly suspected to be the source of these cases; however it has not yet been confirmed. As the investigation continues, the Health Department is advising all individuals to discard all fresh bulk tofu purchased from any New York City store that has been kept at room temperature at the time of purchase. The Health Department is also warning consumers to throw away tofu that has not been stored in a refrigerator at home.

This tofu can be fermented (腐乳) and also made into a popular Chinese dish known as stinky tofu (*chou doufu*; 臭豆腐). Anyone who has made fermented tofu from fresh bulk tofu should also throw it away. Cooking this type of tofu is not a definite safeguard against botulism; the organism's spores can still remain in the tofu and, if the tofu is improperly handled, the spores can produce a toxin that causes illness. Pre-packaged tofu products which are refrigerated are safe.

Botulism impairs the body's nervous system. The symptoms include blurred or double vision, weakness or paralysis, poor reflexes, difficulty swallowing and speaking, and difficulty breathing. Symptoms of foodborne botulism usually occur 12-36 hours after ingestion, but may take several days. If you ate fermented tofu and are experiencing any symptoms, please consult a physician immediately. If left untreated, botulism can be fatal.



The New York City Health Department is working with other agencies to further investigate the source of these two cases. The tofu linked to the two reported cases of botulism is currently being tested for evidence of the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum*.

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