**ALERT 2016 004 HA**

**HIGH ALERT**

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| Subject  TitIe | **Suspected Case of Botulism in Grampian** | | |
| **Sent to** | **NHSG SMS Services; Grampian IEP Services; ADPs; GP surgeries; Community Pharmacies; Health Protection On Call Mental Health Teams; Antibiotic Pharmacists; GMED** | | |
| **Outline of health risk** | The Health Protection Team is investigating a case of suspected botulism in an injecting drug user admitted to ARI.  Botulism is an illness caused by bacteria called Clostridium botulinum. Spores of these bacteria live in soil, and can sometimes contaminate heroin supplies. Once injected, the bacteria can grow and cause wound infections. The bacteria produce a toxin, which causes paralysis of nerves.  **Botulism is a medical emergency and should be considered in any client or patient who presents with some of the following symptoms.**   * double vision * blurred vision * drooping eyelids * slurred speech * difficulty swallowing * dry mouth * muscle weakness * Paralysis of the respiratory muscles, arms, legs, and trunk.   Further information is available from  [www.nhsinform.co.uk/health-library/articles/b/botulism/introduction/](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/health-library/articles/b/botulism/introduction/). | | |
| **Action(s) required** | Any client or patient who presents with these symptoms should be referred for urgent medical assessment in the hospital.  Botulism can be treated with an antitoxin which blocks the action of toxin circulating in the blood. This must be given as soon as possible once botulism is suspected and or diagnosed. | | |
| **Advice for IEP** | Staff and services providing harm reduction advice and needle exchange should raise awareness about botulism with their clients. This should include:   * that injecting drugs such as heroin can increase the risk of botulism * how to reduce the risk of botulism * how to recognise early signs and symptoms of botulism * to urgently seek medical attention should symptoms occur * please signpost and support clients to attend services as appropriate | | |
| **Information for clients** | Botulism spores cannot be seen and there is no way to spot contaminated drugs   * If possible try to stop using heroin – help to do so is available * Smoking heroin can reduce the risk of botulism * If you must inject, inject into a vein avoid going into muscle or under the skin * Use as little citric acid as possible, as a lot of citric acid can damage the body under the skin, and gives bacteria a better chance to grow * Always clean your skin with an alcohol wipe prior to injecting, always use sterile works, never reuse and never share works * If you inject more than one type of drug, inject each at a separate place on your body and use clean works for each injection. This is important because certain drugs (e.g. cocaine) could give bacteria in heroin a better chance to grow * Always get wound infections medically seen * If you get swelling, redness, pus, or pain around the places where you have injected yourself, seek urgent medical attention * Inform clients that botulism can be treated   SDF have produced two useful resources, one for staff and one for people at risk which can be accessed via the following link:  [http://www.sdf.org.uk/news-and-media/sdf-news/sdf-produces-booklet-on-botulism/](http://www.sdf.org.uk/news-and-media/sdf-news/sdf-produces-booklet-on-botulism/%20)  Alert Ends | | |
| **Scope** | A **High Alert** Message is of the highest importance due to a corroborated, demonstrated health risk.  It is part of the NHS Grampian cascade alert process providing a pathway to communicate alerts relating to substance misuse which may have a significant health risk. | | |
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| Sender email address | [**nhsg.substancemisusealert@nhs.net**](mailto:nhsg.substancemisusealert@nhs.net) | **Date** | **19/10/2016** |