

BOTULISM POISONING: MARINE MAMMAL MEAT PRECAUTION

Kuuujuaq, August 12, 2026 – With the arrival of the summer hunting season, the Department of Public Health of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBSS) would like to remind *Nunavimmiut* of the precautions to take to avoid foodborne botulism.

The risk of botulism poisoning is greater during the warm season and is linked to the preservation and preparation methods for some traditional foods, such as fermentation (*igunaq*), drying (*nikku*) or production of oil from marine-mammal fat (*misiraq*). So far, walrus, seal and occasionally beluga are the only food sources that have been associated with botulism outbreaks in Nunavik.

Botulism poisoning, which Inuit refer to as *qasunniq* (a “loosening”), results from the ingestion of a toxin that affects the nervous system (the symptoms primarily appear in the muscles of the face and the respiratory system) and can cause weakness and various gastrointestinal effects.

To ensure that the toxin responsible for botulism does not develop, it is important to chill butchered meat as soon as possible (below 4 degrees Celsius). The same measure applies to the preparation and conservation of foods from marine mammals, outdoors or indoors. As for *igunaq*, the Department of Public Health recommends keeping meat in the freezer (home or community) and to begin the fermentation process in the fall, when temperatures are cooler.

Traditional foods are integral parts of *Nunavimmiut* life. For the sake of everyone's health, the NRBHSS Department of Public Health encourages all *Nunavimmiut* to respect preventive measures.

The Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services is a public agency created in 1978 under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. It is responsible for nearly the entire Quebec territory located north of the 55th parallel in terms of the provision of health and social services for the inhabitants of the 14 communities

Source: Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services

For information: Ann-Sophie Dumont
Communication Advisor, NRBHSS
media.nrbhss@ssss.gouv.qc.ca