

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

## SALLUIT: PRECAUTIONS REQUIRED CONCERNING MEAT FROM MARINE MAMMALS

**Kuujjuaq, May 17, 2023** – The Nunavik Department of Public Health has been informed that seal meat suspected of being contaminated with botulism was placed in the community freezer of Salluit between May 10 and 15, 2024. This meat has been removed from the freezer and analysis is currently underway.

Regarding this situation, we wish to remind Nunavimmiut of certain precautions to take when hunting, storing and preparing traditional foods in order to prevent botulism as well as food poisoning.

Botulism poisoning, also known as qasuniq (slackening), is caused by the ingestion of a toxin that affects the nervous system (causing visual impairment, difficulties swallowing or speaking, etc.), particularly the facial and respiratory muscles. This can lead to weakness and gastrointestinal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, etc.).

To prevent the development of the toxin responsible for botulism, it is crucial to chill meat as soon as possible after the hunt (below 4 degrees Celsius). This rule also applies to the preparation and storage of meat from marine mammals (seal, walrus, beluga). Once produced, the toxin is not destroyed by freezing. It is therefore essential to store meat properly once harvested.

Food poisoning occurs when foods contaminated by bacteria, viruses or toxins are consumed. The symptoms can appear some hours after consumption of the food and often include abdominal cramps or pain, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, fever and headache.

Below are come recommendations to prevent food poisoning:

- wash hands with soap before and after handling food. Rinsing with water is not sufficient:
- avoid thawing perishable foods at room temperature;
- avoid thawing and storing meat from marine mammals or smoked fish in an airtight container:
- discard meat that was thawed or which remained at room temperature for too long.

Traditional foods are an integral part of Nunavimmiut life, and it is of utmost importance to preserve such traditions. However, for everyone's health, the NRBHSS Department of Public Health invites Nunavimmiut to follow these preventive measures.

If you consumed seal meat taken from the freezer between May 10 and 15, 2024, and if you believe you have symptoms of botulism or food poisoning, contact your CLSC/nursing station.

To learn more:

Botulism - Canada.ca

Food poisoning | Gouvernement du Québec (quebec.ca)

Thank you for sharing this information.

Infectious-Diseases Team
Department of Public Health
Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services