

Foodborne poisoning: ciguatera

2007 Case Definition (North Carolina)

Clinical description

Ciguatera fish poisoning is a food intoxication caused by consumption of predatory reef fish that have accumulated toxins in their flesh from consuming fish that eat toxic algae and dinoflagellates. Symptoms of the reaction include tingling or numbness, dry mouth, pupil dilatation, blurred vision, and paralysis. Classic symptoms include reversal of hot and cold sensation (ice cream tastes hot, coffee tastes cold) and aching teeth. In severe cases patients may become hypotensive, progress to coma or experience respiratory arrest. Symptoms typically develop within 48 hours of consuming a poisoned fish. Fish that have typically been implicated include barracuda, grouper, amberjack and snapper.

Laboratory criteria for diagnosis

- Toxin detection in an epidemiologically implicated fish

Case classification

Probable: a clinically compatible case who had a consistent exposure (consumption of fish such as those listed above)

Confirmed: a clinically compatible case with toxin detected in an epidemiologically implicated fish