

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



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Governor

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Vision: To be the **Healthiest State** in the Nation

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DOH ENCOURAGES AWARENESS OF POTENTIAL BACTERIA IN GULF WATERS

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Department of Health (DOH) urges Floridians with certain health conditions to avoid eating raw oysters and exposing open wounds to seawater and estuarine water, which may harbor bacteria called *Vibrio vulnificus*. Occurring naturally in the warm waters of the Gulf coast, particularly during the summer months, *Vibrio vulnificus* has the potential to cause serious illness.

Those with liver damage due to excessive drinking and individuals with liver disease, including Hepatitis C and cirrhosis, are most at risk for developing serious illness from *Vibrio vulnificus*. Other at-risk health conditions include hemochromatosis (iron overload), diabetes, cancer, stomach disorders or any illness or treatment that weakens the immune system. At-risk individuals are more likely to become extremely ill or die from eating raw oysters containing these bacteria. People in these high-risk groups are also at risk of serious illness if they have wounds, cuts or scratches and wade in estuarine areas or seawater where the bacteria might be present. Individuals living without these conditions can become ill from eating raw oysters containing these bacteria and from exposing open wounds to sea and estuarine waters, although their illnesses tend to be less severe.

Symptoms of *Vibrio vulnificus* in wound infections typically include swelling, pain, and redness at the wound site. Both gastrointestinal and wound infections may cause nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, fever, chills, and the formation of blistering skin lesions. Individuals experiencing these symptoms should contact a physician immediately for diagnosis and treatment.

In 2013, several illnesses attributed to *Vibrio vulnificus* infection have been reported in Florida. The Department of Health investigates all cases reported in Florida. When cases result from food exposure, the Department works with regulatory agencies to identify the seafood's harvest area. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) is also notified and may shut down the harvest area and recall seafood if multiple incidents emerge from the same location.

Thoroughly cooking oysters, either by frying, stewing, or roasting eliminates harmful bacteria and viruses in the meat. Consuming raw oysters that have undergone a post-harvest treatment process to eliminate the bacteria can also reduce the risk of illness. Avoiding exposure of open wounds to seawater and estuarine water reduces the risk of wound infections.

The Florida Department of Health works to protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county, & community efforts.

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