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What is *Vibrio vulnificus*?

Vibrio vulnificus is a bacterium in the same family that causes cholera. The bacterium lives in warm seawater and is a salt-requiring organism. It is frequently isolated from oysters and other shellfish in warm coastal waters during the summer months.

What is *Vibrio vulnificus* infection?

Vibrio vulnificus infection is an acute illness that produces septicemia (blood infection) in persons with chronic liver disease, chronic alcoholism, or those who are immunocompromised. When open wounds are exposed to warm seawater, *Vibrio vulnificus* infections may lead to skin breakdown and ulceration. Bloodstream infections, common in immunocompromised persons, can be fatal. The majority of infections in the United States are reported from the Gulf Coast states.

How does *Vibrio vulnificus* infection occur?

Infection occurs after eating contaminated raw or undercooked seafood, particularly oysters. A skin infection occurs when an open wound comes in direct contact with contaminated seawater or seafood.

Is a person with *Vibrio vulnificus* contagious?

No, there is no evidence of person-to-person spread.

How soon after exposure does the infection occur?

Infection may occur within 12 to 72 hours after exposure.

What are the symptoms of *Vibrio vulnificus* infection?

Among healthy people, ingestion of *Vibrio vulnificus* can cause abdominal pain, vomiting, and diarrhea. In immunocompromised persons, particularly those with chronic liver disease, a bloodstream infection may occur and be a severe and life-threatening illness characterized by fever and chills, decreased blood pressure (septic shock) and blistering skin lesions.

How is the infection diagnosed?

The infection is diagnosed by routine stool, wound, or blood cultures.

What is the treatment for *Vibrio vulnificus* infection?

Vibrio vulnificus infection is treated with antibiotics, such as tetracycline, doxycycline, or cephalosporin (e.g., ceftazidime).

How can *Vibrio vulnificus* infection be prevented?

- Do not eat raw oysters or other raw shellfish.
- Cook shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels) thoroughly. Boil until the shells open and continue boiling for 5 minutes, or steam until the shells open during cooking. Do not eat shellfish that do not open during cooking. Boil shucked oysters for at least 3 minutes, or fry them in oil at least 10 minutes at 375°F.
- Avoid cross-contamination of cooked seafood and other foods with raw seafood and their juices.
- Avoid exposure of open wounds or broken skin to warm salt or brackish water, or to raw shellfish harvested from such waters.
- Wear protective clothing (e.g., gloves) when handling raw shellfish.

Want more information?

Information on this disease and many others healthcare topics can be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website www.cdc.gov and search under health topic A-Z.

