

## What to Know About *Vibrio vulnificus*

*Vibrio vulnificus* is a bacterium that causes food-related illness and wound infections.

Approximately 100 *V vulnificus* infections are reported each year in the US. However, people with mild infection typically are not tested for *V vulnificus*, so the actual number of infections is unknown.

In the US, the mortality rate associated with *V vulnificus* infection is approximately 33%, and *V vulnificus* causes more than 95% of seafood-related deaths.

### Where Is *V vulnificus* Found and How Does Infection Occur?

*V vulnificus* is found in brackish water (a mix of saltwater and fresh water) in warm coastal regions around the world. *V vulnificus* is rarely detected in water colder than 13 °C (55.4 °F), so most infections in the US occur between the months of May and October. Hurricanes, storm surges, and coastal flooding are associated with an increase in *V vulnificus* infections.

People become infected with *V vulnificus* either by eating raw or undercooked seafood (primarily oysters, less commonly shellfish or other fish) or by having an open wound that is exposed to seawater or seafood products containing *V vulnificus*.

### Signs and Symptoms of *V vulnificus* Infection

People with food-related *V vulnificus* usually have diarrhea for several days and may have nausea, vomiting, stomach cramping, fever, and chills. Some patients with severe illness develop *V vulnificus* bloodstream infection, which is a life-threatening condition.

*V vulnificus* wound infections may cause skin redness, warmth, swelling, and pain in an affected area (cellulitis). More severe wound infections from *V vulnificus* can result in infection of muscle and widespread tissue destruction.

### Who Is at Risk of Severe *V vulnificus* Infection?

Individuals at increased risk of developing severe *V vulnificus* infection include those with liver disease (such as cirrhosis), cancer, HIV infection, diabetes, or a certain blood disorder (thalassemia), and those who take immunosuppressants or medications to decrease stomach acid levels.

### Diagnosis and Treatment

Diagnosis is made by detecting *V vulnificus* in blood, stool, or wound culture. Individuals with mild symptoms are advised to drink liquids to replace fluid that is lost from diarrhea. Patients with signs or symptoms of more severe infection should be promptly treated with antibiotics and receive close monitoring and supportive care



in a hospital. Patients with wound infections may need surgery to remove infected tissue.

### Infection Prevention

Food-related *V vulnificus* infection can be prevented by not eating raw or undercooked seafood and by use of gloves or careful hand-washing after handling raw shellfish. Patients with open wounds (including recent surgery, skin piercings, or tattoos) should avoid contact with brackish water (no swimming or fishing) and should not handle raw seafood. Wounds or cuts that have been exposed to brackish water or uncooked seafood products should be washed thoroughly with soap and water to decrease the risk of infection.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

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