

Vibrio

Frequently Asked Questions

What is vibrio?

Vibrio (vib-ree-oh) is a disease that affects the stomach and intestines. It is a rare disease and is caused by a bacterium called *Vibrio*. *Vibrio* live in salty water and are typically found along the coastlines of the U.S. from Cape Cod to Florida, in the Gulf of Mexico, and along the entire West Coast. These bacteria occur naturally and are not caused by pollution.

Who gets vibrio?

Anyone can get vibrio. People can get *Vibrio* bacteria in their bodies by eating raw seafood, especially oysters, or by getting seawater into an open wound. People who have weak immune systems are much more likely to develop serious complications from the infection.

Can people with vibrio pass the illness to others?

There is no evidence that vibrio is spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of vibrio?

Symptoms of vibrio may include:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain

In people with weak immune systems, *Vibrio* bacteria can infect the bloodstream, causing a severe and life-threatening illness with symptoms such as:

- Fever
- Chills
- Low blood pressure
- Blisters on skin

Vibrio infections in the bloodstream are fatal about 50% of the time.

How is vibrio diagnosed?

If a health care provider suspects *Vibrio* infection, a sample of the patient's stool, blood and/or infected skin wound will be examined.

What is the treatment for vibrio?

If *vibrio* infection is suspected, treatment should begin immediately because antibiotics improve survival. If a skin wound is infected with *Vibrio*, special attention must be focused on caring for the wound. Removal of the infected limb is sometimes necessary. (NOTE – it is very important to finish your antibiotics, even if you begin to feel better, unless otherwise directed by your health care provider.)

How can vibrio be prevented?

- Avoid eating raw or undercooked fish and shellfish.
- Cook shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels) thoroughly.
- For shellfish in the shell either:
 - Boil until the shells open and continue boiling for five more minutes
 - Steam until the shells open and then continue cooking for nine more minutes
- Do not eat those shellfish that do not open during cooking.
- Boil shucked oysters at least three minutes, or fry them in oil at least 10 minutes at 375 degrees.
- Avoid getting juices from raw shellfish onto other foods.
- Eat shellfish promptly after cooking and refrigerate leftovers.
- Avoid exposing open wounds or broken skin to warm salt or brackish water, or to raw shellfish harvested from such waters.
- Wear protective clothing (such as gloves) when handling raw shellfish.
- Anyone with diarrhea should not prepare food for others.

Where can I get more information?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.