

Vibrio parahaemolyticus

FACTSHEET

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What is *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* infection?

Vibrio parahaemolyticus is a bacterium in the same family that causes cholera. The bacterium lives in the warm coastal waters of the United States and Canada. It is a salt requiring organism. The bacterium is present in higher concentrations in the summer.

How does infection with *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* occur?

Infection occurs after ingestion of contaminated raw or undercooked seafood, particularly oysters. A skin infection may occur when an open wound is exposed to warm seawater populated by the organism.

Who gets *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*?

The severe illness is actually rare but is more common in individuals who have weakened immune systems.

What are the symptoms of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*?

The symptoms are watery diarrhea and abdominal cramps, sometimes accompanied by nausea, vomiting, fever, chills or headache. Occasionally, a dysentery-like illness occurs with bloody or mucoid stools, high fever, and high white blood cell count. Infections occur usually in warm summer months.

How soon after exposure does the infection occur?

Infection may occur within 2 to 48 hours after exposure, but usually between 12 and 24 hours.

How is the infection diagnosed?

Vibrio organisms can be isolated from cultures of stool, wound or blood. A physician should suspect the infection if a patient has watery diarrhea and has eaten raw or undercooked seafood, or when a wound infection occurs after exposure to seawater.

What is the treatment for *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* infection?

Patients should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluids lost through diarrhea. In most cases treatment is not necessary. In severe cases, antibiotics may be used.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Generally, it is not necessary to exclude an infected person from work or school. Food handlers, healthcare workers and daycare providers should discuss any work restrictions with their local health department.

How can *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* 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.
- Eat shellfish promptly after cooking and refrigerate leftovers.
- 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 other healthcare topics can be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website www.cdc.gov and search under health topics A-Z.

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