

July 30, 2014



Health officials urge awareness of potential bacteria in coastal waters

Sarasota County reports two cases - one resulting in a death

SARASOTA COUNTY - The Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County urges area residents and visitors 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*.

A total of 41 cases of *Vibrio vulnificus* were reported statewide during 2013, and there have been at least 11 cases and several deaths (as of 7/25/14), <http://newsroom.doh.state.fl.us/2014/07/25/information-on-vibrio-vulnificus/> due to the infection of an open wound or from consuming raw shellfish.

In Sarasota County, there were no cases reported in 2013. However, there were two cases reported during July, resulting in one recent death not included in the statewide report. Both individuals were middle-age and had medical compromising conditions. Health officials are saddened by the death and say that unfortunately those living with chronic health conditions are at increased risk for adverse outcomes. Both individuals are believed to have gotten infected with the bacteria entering through an open wound.

Occurring naturally in the warm coastal waters, particularly during the summer months, *Vibrio vulnificus* has the potential to cause serious illness. Persons who have wounds, cuts or scratches and wade in estuarine areas or seawater where the bacteria might be present can become ill. Symptoms of *Vibrio vulnificus* in wound infections typically include swelling, pain and redness at the wound site.

Other symptoms of *Vibrio vulnificus* infection include; 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.

Individuals with liver disease, including Hepatitis C and cirrhosis, are most at risk for developing serious illness from *Vibrio vulnificus*. Others who should avoid consuming raw shellfish are those with hemochromatosis (iron overload), diabetes, cancer, stomach disorders or any illness or treatment that weakens the immune system. 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.

Resources for more information:

- Our Gulf Environment: <https://ourgulfenvironment.scgov.net> (please see water quality tab and then click on the bacteria tab)
- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' website: <http://www.freshfromflorida.com/Divisions-Offices/Aquaculture>

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View the complete policy at www.scgov.net/ADA/Pages/default.aspx.*

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