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## Vibrio Vulnificus – Staying Healthy and Safe

### Contact:

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**Naples, Fla.** – The Florida Department of Health in Collier County (DOH-Collier) reminds Floridians to be aware of the potential risks associated with eating raw or undercooked shellfish, and exposing open wounds, cuts, or scratches on the skin to warm, brackish, or salt water.

“We want everyone to enjoy our beaches and fresh seafood this summer, but we also want people to be aware that eating raw shellfish, or exposing open wounds to brackish or salt water, can cause illness due to *Vibrio* bacteria,” **said DOH-Collier Administrator Kim Kossler.** “Individuals should keep open wounds away from brackish and salt water. Also, shellfish should be cooked thoroughly to avoid health risks.”

*Vibrio vulnificus* is a bacterium that normally lives in warm, brackish seawater. Since it is naturally found in warm marine waters, people with open wounds can be exposed to *Vibrio vulnificus* through direct contact with seawater. Also, *Vibrio vulnificus* can cause disease in those who eat raw shellfish. *Vibrio vulnificus* infections are rare, with an average of 30 people diagnosed with the disease each year in Florida. There have been three cases in Collier County since 2022.

Ingestion of *Vibrio vulnificus* can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. *Vibrio vulnificus* can also cause an infection of the skin when open wounds are exposed to warm seawater; these infections may lead to skin breakdown and ulcers. Healthy individuals typically develop a mild disease; however, *Vibrio vulnificus* infections can be a serious concern for people who have weakened immune systems, particularly those with chronic liver disease. If someone is concerned that they may have been exposed to *Vibrio vulnificus* and are experiencing the above symptoms, they should seek medical attention immediately.

### Tips to Stay Healthy and Safe:

- Do not eat raw oysters or other raw shellfish.
- Cook shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels) thoroughly.
- For shellfish in the shell, either a) boil until the shells open and continue boiling for 5 more minutes, or b) steam until the shells open and then continue cooking for 9 more minutes. Do not eat those shellfish that do not open during cooking. Boil shucked oysters 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 juices from raw seafood.
- 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.

For more information, please contact DOH-Collier at 239-252-8226, or visit the [DOH-Collier website](#) or the [DOH \*Vibrio vulnificus\* website](#).

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