

Vibrio

What is Vibrio?

About a dozen Vibrio species can cause illness, known as vibriosis. The most common species causing human illness in the United States are Vibrio parahaemolyticus, Vibrio vulnificus, and Vibrio alginolyticus. Vibriosis causes an estimated 80,000 illnesses and 100 deaths in the United States every year. People with vibriosis become infected by consuming raw or undercooked seafood or exposing a wound to seawater. Most infections occur from May through October when water temperatures are warmer.

What kind of germ is Vibrio?

Vibrio bacteria naturally live in certain coastal waters and are present in higher concentrations between May and October when water temperatures are warmer.

How can Vibrio be diagnosed?

A clinician may suspect vibriosis if a patient has watery diarrhea and has recently eaten raw or undercooked seafood, especially oysters, or when a wound infection occurs after exposure to seawater. Infection is diagnosed when Vibrio bacteria are found in the stool, wound, or blood of a patient who has symptoms of vibriosis.

How can Vibrio be treated?

Treatment is not necessary in mild cases, but patients should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluids lost through diarrhea. Although there is no evidence that antibiotics decrease the severity or duration of illness, they are sometimes used in severe or prolonged illnesses.

Are there any long-term effects of Vibrio?

Most people with a mild case of vibriosis recover after about 3 days with no lasting effects. However, people with a Vibrio vulnificus infection can get seriously ill and need intensive care or limb amputation. About 1 in 5 people with this type of infection die, sometimes within a day or two of becoming ill.

How can humans get Vibrio?

Most people become infected by eating raw or undercooked shellfish, particularly oysters. Certain Vibrio species can also cause a skin infection when an open wound is exposed to salt water or brackish water. Brackish water is a mixture of fresh and salt water. It is often found where rivers meet the sea.

How can Vibrio be prevented?

Don't eat raw or undercooked oysters or other shellfish. Cook them before eating. Always wash your hands with soap and water after handling raw shellfish. Avoid contaminating cooked shellfish with raw shellfish and its juices. Stay out of salt water or brackish water if you have a wound. Wear protective clothes if you are in a group that is more likely to get vibriosis.