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HEALTH OFFICIALS ENCOURAGE AWARENESS OF POTENTIAL BACTERIA IN LOCAL WATERS

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Pensacola, Fla. – PENSACOLA, FL – The Florida Department of Health in Escambia County urges residents and visitors to limit exposure to *Vibrio vulnificus*. Occurring naturally in the warm coastal waters, particularly during the summer months, *Vibrio vulnificus* has the potential to cause serious illness.

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, cuts, or scratches can be exposed to *Vibrio vulnificus* through direct contact with seawater or estuarine water. Also, *Vibrio vulnificus* can cause disease in those who eat raw or undercooked oysters and shellfish.

Healthy individuals typically develop a mild disease; however, *Vibrio vulnificus* infections can be a serious concern for people who have weakened immune systems.

- Symptoms of *Vibrio vulnificus* can include vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain.
- Wound infection can lead to skin breakdown and blistering.
- In persons who have weakened immune systems, particularly those with chronic liver disease, *Vibrio vulnificus* can invade the bloodstream, causing a severe, life-threatening illness with symptoms like fever, chills, decreased blood pressure (septic shock) and blistering skin lesions.

Individuals experiencing these symptoms should contact a physician immediately for diagnosis and treatment. Individuals with wound infections should also seek care promptly.

“It is important for people to be vigilant of these symptoms and seek immediate medical care,” said Marie Mott, Administrator of the Florida Department of Health in Escambia County.

“Residents and visitors should also avoid consuming raw and undercooked shellfish as well as foods that have come into contact with raw seafood. Those with open wounds should not enter the water.”

TIPS TO STAY HEALTHY AND SAFE

1. Thoroughly cook oysters and other shellfish, either by frying, stewing, or roasting to eliminate harmful bacteria and viruses in the meat.

2. Avoid exposing open wounds, cuts, or scratches to seawater or estuarine water.

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