

## 1) What is Vibrio vulnificus (VIB-ree-o vul-NIF-i-cus)?

It is a naturally occurring bacterium in marine and estuarine waters throughout the world. It thrives in warm waters so we see Vibrio vulnificus cases during the summer months.

## 2) Can you test for this bacteria?

Yes, but it is not necessary. We know it is found in all marine and estuarine waters.

## 3) How common is this infection?

This is a rare infection. According to CDC there were 58 cases of vibrio vulnificus reported in the United States in 1997 and 1998. Each year there are over 400 million visits to beaches and recreational areas. This number does not include those who work on the water. In Virginia, 3 cases were reported in 1998 and 4 cases in 1999.

## 4) How can you get this infection?

Exposure can occur in two ways:

You can get infected through eating raw or undercooked shellfish. Persons with liver disease such as cirrhosis, chronic medical conditions such as kidney disease, iron disorders, or diabetes or those who are immunocompromised are at a high risk of severe or fatal infection from Vibrio vulnificus. These people should not eat raw shellfish. This bacterium poses little risk to healthy people.

You can get infected by getting seawater on an open wound, cut, sore or puncture. The bacterium can enter through a break in the skin and cause the infection. In some people the infection resolves by itself, in others it progresses to severe skin damage.

## 5) What should you do if you get a cut or wound in the water?

If you get cut or wounded in these waters, be sure to clean the wound. Soap and water is fine. Also you can use a disinfectant such as hydrogen peroxide. Cleaning the wound is most important. If you notice signs of infection such as redness, swelling or warmth, see your doctor.

## 6) Should you avoid Chesapeake Bay waters?

People who swim or fish in the Chesapeake Bay have little risk of contracting Vibrio vulnificus. Wash and clean all cuts and wounds you get while in the water. If you have

liver disease, or are immunocompromised, do not eat raw shellfish. People should continue to enjoy water activities on the Chesapeake Bay.

