

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 29, 2002

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STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER ADVISES ON POTENTIAL RISK OF EATING RAW SHELLFISH

(Richmond, Va.)—State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H., is advising people of the potential risk of eating **raw** oysters, clams and other shellfish.

“We want everyone to enjoy fresh seafood this summer, but we also want people to be aware that eating raw molluscan shellfish can cause illness due to *Vibrio* bacteria. For people with certain medical conditions, eating raw shellfish can cause serious illness or even death,” Dr. Stroube said. “Eating thoroughly cooked shellfish does not pose a health risk.”

Different kinds of *Vibrio* bacteria are found naturally in coastal waters and are not a result of pollution. *Vibrio* bacteria can be found in waters approved for oyster and clam harvesting. During the warm weather months more of the bacteria can be found in shellfish and the risk is higher.

One particular kind of *Vibrio* bacteria (*Vibrio vulnificus*) can cause serious illness or even death for people considered high risk. People at "high risk" include those who have liver disease, excessive alcohol intake, diabetes, AIDS or HIV infection, stomach disorders, inflammatory bowel disease, cancer, abnormal iron metabolism, steroid dependency or any illness or medical treatment which results in a compromised immune system. Older adults are more likely to have the specific health conditions and should be aware of their health status.

“People considered high risk need to be especially careful to avoid eating raw shellfish,” Dr. Stroube said. “Although rare, *Vibrio* bacteria also can cause a gastrointestinal illness in people who eat raw or undercooked oysters or clams, regardless of age or health history.”

Vibrio bacteria do not change the appearance, taste, or odor of oysters or clams. Eating raw oysters or clams with hot sauce or while drinking alcohol does not destroy the bacteria. Only thoroughly cooking the oysters or clams will destroy the bacteria and eliminate risk of infection.

Symptoms of illness from *Vibrio* bacteria include vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pains, severe weakness, skin rashes, blisters, shaking chills and high fever. If you have any of these symptoms, see your doctor for medical treatment.

Infection also can occur when cuts, burns or sores are exposed to seawater containing *Vibrio* bacteria. If you get a cut or wound while in the water, clean the wound with soap and water or a disinfectant, such as hydrogen peroxide. If you notice signs of infection, such as redness or swelling, see your doctor.

For more information, log onto the Virginia Department of Health’s Web site at www.vdh.state.va.us.

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