

## Fish-Handler's disease

Fish-handler's disease is a broad term used to describe an illness that may occur after handling fish or other aquatic organisms.

### How do you get Fish-Handler's disease?

Fish-handler's disease occurs when cuts or scrapes in the skin become infected with the bacteria. Handling shellfish, tropical fish, cleaning aquariums, swimming pools, fishing, lobster catching, and many other similar activities can introduce these bacteria into cuts and scrapes. This disease can be associated with almost any organism that lives in saltwater, freshwater, or brackish water.

### How do you avoid an infection?

Fish or other aquatic organisms with visible surface lesions should not be handled with bare hands (wear gloves to help prevent infections) and not eaten. However, cooked aquatic organisms have not been reported to cause fish-handler's disease.



**For more helpful tips for staying safe and healthy in natural waterways visit:**

[www.SwimHealthyVa.com](http://www.SwimHealthyVa.com)

**Find your local Health Department at:**

[www.vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/)



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*To protect the health and promote the well-being of all people in Virginia.*

# Water Illness & Injury Prevention for Watermen and Fish-Handlers



## Vibriosis

Most non-cholera vibrio bacteria are found in saltwater or brackish water but may be found in fresh water, too. These bacteria may cause skin infections. Brackish water is a mixture of fresh and sea water found where rivers meet the sea.

### What does skin infected with vibrio bacteria look like?

Open round sores may appear on skin infected with vibrio bacteria. Skin may become warm to the touch, red and swollen.

### How do you get skin infections from vibrio bacteria?

Vibrio bacteria can cause an infection by entering through cuts or open sores on skin. Vibrio bacteria is natural. Its found in coastal waters including the Chesapeake Bay and Virginia's Rivers where people swim and fish.



### How do you prevent vibrio skin-infections?

- ◆ Stay out of brackish or salt water if you have cuts, scrapes or a more serious skin wound.
- ◆ Use waterproof bandages on existing skin wounds if water contact cannot be avoided.
- ◆ Wash cuts, scrapes, or skin wounds with soap and clean water if they have been exposed to seawater, raw seafood or its juices.
- ◆ Use antibiotic ointment and waterproof bandages after the wound has been cleaned.
- ◆ If the wound is swollen, red, or feels hot to the touch, seek medical attention and notify them of exposure to seawater, raw seafood or its juices.
- ◆ Protect skin on hands and feet from cuts using gloves and water shoes.
- ◆ People with health conditions may have weakened immune systems and may be more prone to infections caused by germs in natural waterways. Consider limiting contact with untreated water sources.

## Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

A bloom often results in a color change in the water. In salt or brackish water a bloom may appear red or brown while in freshwater it may appear blue-green or red. Most blooms are not harmful but some may produce toxins which could affect fish and humans, as well as other animals like birds. These are known as Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs).



### How do you get exposed to HABs?

People may consume toxins that are present in shellfish or finfish harvested from marine impacted bloom waters, by accidentally swallowing harmful cyanobacteria bloom toxins while swimming in freshwater lakes, or by inhaling toxins that become airborne by wave-action.

### How do you avoid contact with HABs?

- ◆ Avoid water that has an unusual color, odor, or where advisory signs are posted.
- ◆ Do not harvest shellfish in areas under an advisory.
- ◆ Wear rubber gloves if contact with affected waters must be made.
- ◆ Rinse exposed skin with water.