

Woman contracts flesh-eating bacteria in Gulf of Mexico

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<http://www.wsbtv.com/news/trending-now/woman-contracts-flesh-eating-bacteria-in-gulf-of-mexico/551697579>

A 70-year-old Mississippi woman spent nearly two weeks in the hospital and underwent several surgeries in order to save her hand after she contracted a flesh-eating bacteria while fishing in the Gulf of Mexico off the municipal pier near Fairhope, Alabama.

According to a story from Gulf Coast News Today, the woman, who was not named, contracted the bacteria *Vibrio vulnificus* after the fishing trip in June. The woman said she reached into a bait bucket of live shrimp and pricked the back of her hand.

The woman's husband said it took only three hours before his wife was "deathly sick."

She was taken to the hospital where doctors operated on her hand soon after she was admitted. Health officials say they are not sure whether the woman got the bacteria from the waters she was fishing in or the shrimp she used as bait. Shellfish can carry the bacteria.

Forty-six people contracted *Vibrio vulnificus* in the waters off Florida's coast in 2016, with 10 of those people dying within days of being infected.

The infection comes from either eating raw shellfish contaminated with the bacteria or swimming in warm waters where the bacteria live when you have a cut or scrape on your skin.

Below is a Q&A from the Florida Department of Health that answers some common questions about *Vibrio* and offers some tips on avoiding an infection.

How do persons get infected with *Vibrio vulnificus*?

People can get infected with *Vibrio vulnificus* when they eat raw shellfish, particularly oysters. The bacterium is frequently isolated from oysters and other shellfish in warm coastal waters during the summer months. People with open wounds can be exposed to *Vibrio vulnificus* through direct contact with seawater. There is no evidence of person-to-person transmission of *Vibrio vulnificus*.

What type of illness does *Vibrio vulnificus* cause?

Vibrio vulnificus can cause disease in those who eat contaminated seafood or have an open wound that is exposed to warm seawater containing the bacteria. Ingestion of *Vibrio vulnificus* can cause vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain. *Vibrio vulnificus* can also cause an infection of the skin when open wounds are exposed to warm seawater; these infections may lead to skin breakdown and ulcers. Healthy individuals typically develop a mild disease; however, *Vibrio vulnificus* infections can be a serious concern for people who have weakened immune systems, particularly those with chronic liver disease. *Vibrio vulnificus* bloodstream infections are fatal about 50 percent of the time.

How common is *Vibrio vulnificus* infection?

Vibrio vulnificus is a rare cause of disease, but it is also under reported. Between 1988 and 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) received reports of more than 900 *Vibrio vulnificus* infections from the Gulf Coast states, where most cases occur. Before 2007, there was no national surveillance system for *Vibrio vulnificus*, but CDC collaborated with Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi to monitor the number of cases in the

Gulf Coast region. In 2007, infections caused by *Vibrio vulnificus* and other *Vibrio* species became nationally notifiable.

What are some tips for preventing *Vibrio vulnificus* infections from raw seafood?

Do not eat raw oysters or other raw shellfish.

Cook shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels) thoroughly. Cooking kills *Vibrio*.

For shellfish in the shell, either a) boil until the shells open and continue boiling for 5 more minutes, or b) steam until the shells open and then continue cooking for 9 more minutes. Do not eat those shellfish that do not open during cooking. Boil shucked oysters at least 3 minutes, or fry them in oil at least 10 minutes at 375 degrees.

Avoid cross-contamination of cooked seafood and other foods with raw seafood and juices from raw seafood.

Eat shellfish promptly after cooking and refrigerate leftovers.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer these tips for avoiding the bacteria found in warm waters.

Stay out of brackish or salt water if you have a wound (including cuts and scrapes), or cover your wound with a waterproof bandage if there's a possibility it could come into contact with brackish or salt water, raw seafood, or raw seafood juices.

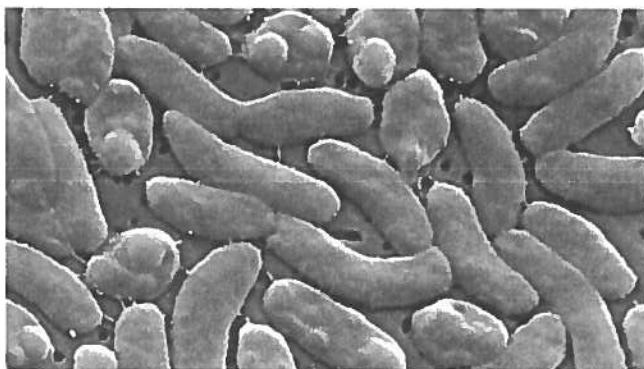
Wash wounds and cuts thoroughly with soap and water if they have been exposed to seawater or raw seafood or its juices.

If you develop a skin infection, tell your medical provider if your skin has come into contact with brackish or salt water, raw seafood, or raw seafood juices.

Wear clothes and shoes that can protect you from cuts and scrapes when in brackish or salt water.

Wear protective gloves when handling raw seafood.

According to the CDC, an average of 50 culture-confirmed cases, 45 hospitalizations, and 16 deaths are reported from *Vibrio vulnificus* each year from the Gulf Coast region -- Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Nationwide, there are as many as 95 cases (half are culture confirmed), 85 hospitalizations, and 35 deaths.



This scanning electron microscopical (SEM) image depicts a grouping of *Vibrio vulnificus* bacteria. CDC/Janice Haney Carr

