



# JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

615 Sheridan Street ♦ Port Townsend ♦ Washington ♦ 98368  
www.jeffersoncountypublichealth.org

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## Health Advisory

### *Vibrio vulnificus* Reported in Washington State Waters

October 9, 2013

Dear Colleagues:

#### Healthcare providers should:

- Be aware that *Vibrio vulnificus* (Vv) has been identified locally in oysters.
- Be aware that Vv can cause acute gastroenteritis and can also cause severe, invasive illness including blistering skin lesions and sepsis. Serious infections due to Vv most commonly occur in persons with immunocompromising conditions, especially those with liver disease.
- Consider the diagnosis of Vv in patients (particularly those with liver disease and immune system compromise) with sepsis and a history of seafood (particularly undercooked oyster) consumption or marine water exposure.
- Notify the clinical laboratory when submitting specimens if you are suspicious of Vv so that appropriate techniques are used to identify the organism.
- Report suspect cases to Jefferson County Public Health by calling 360-385-9400

#### Background

The following information has been provided by the Washington State Department of Health (WA DOH). Each summer the WA DOH Office of Shellfish and Water Protection (OSWP) harvests oysters from a sampling of WA waters for routine testing. In August 2013, *Vibrio vulnificus* (Vv) was detected from oyster samples by PCR and by culture. This finding is a first for WA PHL, though reports of isolation of Vv in Washington have been described in the past, including in a sediment sample described by the FDA in 1987 and oyster samples collected by FDA at the retail level in 2007. In addition to the OSWP testing, the FDA isolated what appear to be Vv in oyster samples from Washington collected for a research study during the 2013 summer. FDA is still in the process of confirming their findings.

The Vv isolates from oysters tested through OSWP have been sent to FDA and CDC for additional characterization. By comparing genetic markers among other isolates known to be associated with human illness or not, the FDA has determined that the WA PHL isolates are within a group that is considered to be of low virulence.

**To date, there have been no illness reports of people acquiring Vv infections in association with either consuming Washington oysters or exposure to Washington marine waters.** Prior Vv infections among Washington residents have been associated with travel to the Gulf Coast states.

Like *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, the Vv bacteria can be killed in shellfish by cooking thoroughly.

## Resources

Additional information regarding Vv infections can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/vibriov/technical.html>

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/5100/420-038-Guideline-Vibriosis.pdf>

This message will be posted on our website, see Information for Providers

<http://www.jeffersoncountypublichealth.org>

Please call (360) 385-9400 to report cases and if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Locke, M.D., M.P.H.

Jefferson County Health Officer

Jefferson County Public Health

(360) 385-9400 (office)