



For Immediate Release
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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH REMINDER ABOUT POTENTIAL RISK OF EATING
RAW OYSTERS**

Tallahassee -- As the temperature rises in our state, so does the incidence of illness from a bacterium called *Vibrio vulnificus*, often found in raw oysters. Those most at-risk for developing serious illness from *Vibrio vulnificus* include heavy drinkers and people with certain health conditions such as liver disease, diabetes, cancer, stomach disorders or any illness or treatment that weakens the immune system. While otherwise healthy persons eating raw oysters contaminated with this bacterium are less susceptible to becoming ill, at-risk individuals are likely to become extremely ill or die. People in these high-risk groups are also at risk of illness if they have wounds or cuts and wade in estuarine areas or seawater.

Thoroughly cooking oysters, either by frying, stewing or roasting, eliminates harmful bacteria and viruses in the meat. Consuming raw oysters that have undergone a treatment process to eliminate the bacteria can also reduce the risk of illness. Initial symptoms of *Vibrio vulnificus* infection can include mild nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, followed by distinctive swollen skin lesions, and septicemia (blood poisoning). If someone experiences these symptoms after consuming raw oysters, they should contact their personal physician immediately to receive antibiotic treatment.

Last year, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) investigated 19 cases of *Vibrio vulnificus*, six of which resulted in death. Eleven of the cases and three deaths were attributed to wound exposure; five of the cases and one death were attributed to consumption of raw oysters; and the method of exposure of three of the cases and two deaths was undetermined. For more information, please visit DOH's website at www.doh.state.fl.us and choose "Food and Waterborne Disease" from the subject list. Information can also be obtained by visiting the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference website at www.issc.org/, choose "Consumer Education" from the Subject List, then choose, "Risks of Eating Raw Oysters" or from the CDC website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm>. Click on Health Topics A-Z and choose *Vibrio vulnificus*.

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