



Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
Office of the Commissioner
410 Willoughby Ave., Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 465-5009, Fax 465-5097



Alaska Department of Health and Social Services
Office of the Commissioner
350 Main Street, Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 465-3030, Fax 465-3068

Joint News Release

Contacts:

DHSS: Kerre Fisher (269-2042) or Sherry Hill, (907) 465-1618 www.state.ak.us/dhss/

DEC: Mike Ostasz (907) 269-7638 www.state.ak.us/dec/

A Public Health Alert: *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*

August 3, 2004—The departments of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and Environmental Conservation (DEC) are investigating an outbreak of gastrointestinal illness caused by a bacterium called *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*. The outbreak has been linked to the consumption of raw or undercooked oysters harvested from Prince William Sound (PWS) this summer. *V. parahaemolyticus* has never been previously detected in Alaskan waters because it requires a water temperature of 17° C (62°F) or greater in order to bloom. Therefore, Alaska's waters have historically been considered too cold for the bacteria to grow.

Two laboratory-confirmed case-patients have been identified to date; however, at least 10 additional reports of gastrointestinal illness following raw PWS oyster consumption have been reported to the Alaska Section of Epidemiology.

On July 21, DEC staff inspected the implicated oyster farm and collected water, sediment, and oyster samples for laboratory testing. Samples from all three mediums were positive for *V. parahaemolyticus*. A stop sale notice was subsequently issued on July 28. The farm complied with the stop sale notice. In addition, as per DEC request, the farm managers have attempted to contact vendors and make sure all remaining product has been removed.

DEC is instituting a new *V. parahaemolyticus* control plan, which will include monitoring of waters and oyster samples from other growing areas throughout the state. The suspect growing area will be closed until product samples are in compliance with the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) requirements.

-more-

FACTS ABOUT VIBRIO PARAHAEMOLYTICUS:

Agent: *V. parahaemolyticus* is a vibrio (bacteria) that can be naturally present in marine coastal environments. Persons who ingest vibrios via consumption of contaminated food or water can develop gastroenteritis. The most common vehicle for *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* infections is raw or undercooked shellfish, particularly oysters.

Incubation period: Illness onset ranges from 4 to 30 hours after exposure (usually 12-24 hours).

Symptoms: The most common symptoms are watery diarrhea and abdominal cramps; however, persons may also experience, nausea, vomiting, fever, and headache. Mucoïd or bloody stools are reported occasionally; systemic illness and death are rare.

Infectiousness: Persons with *V. parahaemolyticus* are NOT infectious to other persons.

Duration of illness and treatment: Persons are typically symptomatic for 1 to 7 days. There is no specific treatment for *V. parahaemolyticus* infections.

To report suspected or confirmed cases of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, call the Section of Epidemiology at 907-269-8000 during business hours or 1-800-478-0084 after hours. Additional information about *V. parahaemolyticus* can be found on the Epidemiology website: www.epi.Alaska.gov.

More information:

http://www.state.ak.us/dec/old_dec/deh/fss/pdf/shellfishclass.pdf - growing area certification

http://www.state.ak.us/dec/old_dec/deh/fss/pdf/shellfishpermit.pdf - permit requirements