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THE FACTS ABOUT VIBRIO BACTERIA

- *Vibrio* bacteria are common and occur naturally in many marine environments. They are not related to pollution! Most *Vibrio* bacteria are benign, however two species *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (*V. p.*) and *Vibrio vulnificus* (*V. v.*) have been associated with human illness. According to the latest statistics, **less than 1% of food-borne illness is related to *Vibrio***, and the vast majority of illnesses are associated with chicken and meat products.

- Shellfish, which are filter feeders, can accumulate *Vibrio* bacteria and if enough of the bacteria are consumed by humans, illness can result. The most common symptoms are mild flu-like gastroenteritis that typically passes in 2 to 3 days.

- *V.p.* outbreaks are typically associated with shellfish harvested in warmer waters and are common in Japan. They are also occasionally found on the Pacific and Gulf Coasts, and one outbreak has been reported on the East Coast,

- *V.V.* infections have also come from swimming in Gulf Coast waters by those with cuts, abrasions or open wounds. Individuals who are immune compromised (from liver disease, immuno-suppressant drugs) can have more severe reactions to *V. v.* including blood disorders, and in rare cases death. These high- risk individuals should be wary of eating raw shellfish or any raw proteins, but can safely enjoy thoroughly cooked seafoods.

- To ensure the safety of shellfish, the u.s. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in cooperation with state health departments carefully regulates shellfish growing areas and the care and handling of shellfish. The National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) requires harvesters and dealers to be licensed, inspected and certified. Our nation's shellfish suppliers are heavily regulated.

- Consumers can avoid *Vibrio*-related illness by following current health advisories and using proper handling
 - 0 Only purchase shellfish from certified dealers and retailers
 - 0 Verify that shellfish is fresh and harvested from an approved area
 - 0 Make sure shellfish is stored under proper refrigeration or ice
 - 0 At-risk consumers should enjoy their shellfish cooked and avoid all raw animal proteins

- Seafood is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle. In fact, in its 2005 Dietary Guidelines, the U.S. government prominently featured recommendations for Americans to maintain a healthy weekly serving of seafood in their diets. Proteins, vitamins and fatty acids found in seafood contribute to improved cardiovascular and neurological health as well as healthy physical development in children.