



Department of Health and Human Services
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
286 Water Street
11 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011
Tel: (207) 287-8016; Fax (207) 287-9058
TTY Users: Dial 711 (Maine Relay)

Maine Health Alert Network (HAN) System

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

To: Health Care Providers
From: Dr. Isaac Benowitz, State Epidemiologist
Subject: Recommendations for Diagnosing and Testing for Vibriosis
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Recommendations for Diagnosing and Testing for Vibriosis

Background

Vibriosis is caused by *Vibrio* bacteria that naturally live in certain coastal waters. Most infections occur after eating raw or undercooked shellfish. Some types of *Vibrio* cause skin infections when an open wound is exposed to salt water or brackish water. Individuals with immunocompromising conditions or chronic liver disease are most likely to be infected with *Vibrio*. Eating raw seafood and coming into contact with salt water or brackish water can increase the likelihood of acquiring the disease.

Symptoms of vibriosis acquired through ingestion may include abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever. Symptoms typically begin within 24 hours of ingestion. Most mild cases recover within three days. However, severe cases may require hospitalization. Symptoms of vibriosis acquired through wounds may include fever, redness, pain, swelling, warmth, discoloration, and discharge.

As of September 5, 2023, there have been 12 reported probable and confirmed cases of vibriosis in Maine residents this year. The majority of vibriosis cases are reported in the summer and fall months when the coastal waters are warmer.

Recommendations

Vibrio bacteria can be found in the stool, wound, or blood of a patient who has symptoms of vibriosis. Providers should consider and test for *Vibrio* when patients present with gastrointestinal illness and have recently consumed raw or undercooked seafood. Providers should also consider and test for *Vibrio* when patients present with wound infections who may have had water exposures.

Treatment is not necessary in mild cases, but patients should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluids lost through diarrhea. Antibiotics are sometimes used in severe or prolonged illnesses. Providers with questions about when a patient may return to school, work, or childcare should consult with Maine CDC for guidance.

There are different species of *Vibrio* and in Maine some of the more common ones include *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, *Vibrio fluvialis*, and *Vibrio alginolyticus*. While the risk of *Vibrio vulnificus* infections in Maine is currently very rare, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S. CDC) recently issued a health advisory alerting providers of risks of fatal *Vibrio vulnificus* infections, including wound and foodborne infections, and provided recommendations regarding managing *V. vulnificus* wound infections:

- U.S. CDC: *Severe Vibrio vulnificus Infections in the United States Associated with Warming Coastal Waters* (September 1, 2023, available online at <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2023/han00497.asp>)

Vibrio specimens and isolates are required to be submitted to Maine's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL) for confirmation and additional testing.

Reporting

Vibriosis is reportable in Maine. All positive laboratory reports should be reported by electronic lab report, by fax to 1-800-293-7534, or by phone to 1-800-821-5821.

For more information

- Maine CDC Vibriosis website: www.maine.gov/dhhs/vibrio
- U.S. CDC Vibriosis website: <https://www.cdc.gov/vibrio/>
- How to submit vibrio specimens and isolates to HETL: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/health-and-environmental-testing/micro/documents/Detection-of-Vibrio-by-Culture-LSIS.pdf>
- Maine CDC disease reporting and consultation line: 1-800-821-5821 (available 24/7)