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Vibrio and Pregnancy

This sheet talks about the risks that exposure to *Vibrio* can have during pregnancy. With each pregnancy, all women have a 3% to 5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

What is Vibrio?

Vibrio is a kind of bacteria that live in warm, coastal seawater. There are many different kinds of *Vibrio* bacteria, and each can cause a different kind of illness. Some *Vibrio* bacteria will cause only a mild stomachache and diarrhea. Other *Vibrio* bacteria can cause severe diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and wound infection that can be life threatening.

Cholera, a very severe diarrhea illness, is caused by two specific groups of *Vibrio cholerae*. These groups of *Vibrio cholerae* are **not** usually found in the United States, so the risk of someone in the United States getting cholera is very low.

How can I get a Vibrio infection?

There are two ways that people can be exposed to *Vibrio*. One way is by eating raw or undercooked shellfish (like oysters) that came from seawater where there is *Vibrio* bacteria. The other way is by exposing an open wound or sore to seawater that has *Vibrio* bacteria. *Vibrio* is usually not passed from person to person. People who have a weak immune system are at a greater risk for getting a *Vibrio* infection.

How can I protect myself from Vibrio after a hurricane or a flood?

Seawater that floods an area may contain *Vibrio* bacteria. You should try to avoid

exposing open wounds or sores to seawater or floodwater by wearing boots and other protective gear. Even a scrape in the skin can be an opening for the *Vibrio* bacteria to enter. If a wound is exposed to seawater or floodwater, wash the area with soap and clean water as soon as possible. After floodwaters have dried, the *Vibrio* bacteria can no longer survive so the risk of infection should not be a concern.

Will Vibrio make me sick?

If you eat raw or undercooked shellfish that contains *Vibrio*, you can get a stomachache and diarrhea. This type of infection is not usually dangerous. However, it is important that you drink plenty of liquids and see a doctor if it becomes severe or lasts a long time.

If a wound is infected with *Vibrio*, the area around the wound will become red and swollen. The bacteria from the wound can enter the blood and cause fevers, chills, and blisters. If this infection is not immediately treated, it can cause death. People who have liver disease or a weak immune system are much more likely to become seriously ill from a *Vibrio* infection. People usually get sick from *Vibrio* 1-3 days after eating contaminated shellfish or after exposing a wound to contaminated seawater.

How do I know if I have a Vibrio infection?

Vibrio infection usually occurs from eating raw or uncooked seafood or if there is a

break in the skin that allows the bacteria to enter the body after being in contaminated seawater. If you have had either of these exposures and develop severe diarrhea with vomiting, cramps and fever, or have redness and swelling around a wound, you should see a doctor immediately. A doctor can look for the *Vibrio* bacteria in a wound, blood, or stool. Mild stomach illness from *Vibrio* does not usually need to be treated, but a wound infection should be treated immediately with medicine prescribed by a doctor.

Can a *Vibrio* infection during my pregnancy hurt my baby?

Vibrio infection during pregnancy has not been studied, so it is not known if *Vibrio* can harm a developing baby. If you are pregnant and you think you have a *Vibrio* infection, you should see a doctor immediately. Many antibiotics that kill *Vibrio* bacteria are safe to use during pregnancy. Tetracycline and doxycycline are generally avoided during pregnancy unless other alternatives are not available or have not been effective. If you have a *Vibrio* infection, remind your doctor that you are pregnant, and your doctor can prescribe the right medicine for you.

Do I have to stop breastfeeding if I have a *Vibrio* infection?

There have been no studies looking at *Vibrio* infection and breastfeeding. However, breast milk can help protect babies from many kinds of bacteria. Therefore, it may not be necessary to stop breastfeeding if you have a *Vibrio* infection. If you are breastfeeding and think you have a *Vibrio* infection, you should talk to your doctor immediately. Just like during pregnancy, you should let your doctor know that you are breastfeeding so that you can be given the right medicine.

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*If you have questions about the information on this fact sheet or other exposures during pregnancy, call **OTIS** at **1-866-626-6847**.*