Vibrio

This sheet is about exposure to Vibrio in a pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information is based on available published literature. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare provider.

What is Vibrio?

Vibrio is a bacteria that lives in warm coastal seawater. There are many different kinds of Vibrio bacteria. Each kind can cause a different illness. Sometimes the illness related to vibrio infection is called Vibriosis. It is commonly called Vibrio for short.

Some Vibrio bacteria will cause only a mild stomachache and mild diarrhea. Other Vibrio bacteria can cause severe diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and wound infections that can be life-threatening. Cholera, a very severe form of diarrhea, is caused by two specific groups of Vibrio cholerae. These groups of Vibrio cholerae are not usually found in the United States, so the chance of someone in the United States getting cholera is very low.

How do you 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 come from seawater where there are 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.

How can I find out if I am infected with Vibrio?

A healthcare provider can test stool (poop) for Vibrio.

How can I protect myself from vibrio infection?

Seawater that takes over an area after a hurricane or flood might contain Vibrio bacteria. 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.

Since eating raw or undercooked seafood has also been associated with vibrio infection, fully cooking seafood before eating it is a good way to prevent infection.

Will Vibrio make me sick? How do I know if I have a vibrio Infection?

Eating raw or undercooked shellfish contaminated with Vibrio can cause a stomachache and diarrhea. This type of infection is not usually dangerous. However, it is important to drink plenty of fluids to help prevent side effects of dehydration (not having enough water in the body). See a healthcare provider if symptoms become severe or last 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 treated, it could turn into a serious infection.

People usually get sick from Vibrio 1 to 3 days after eating contaminated shellfish or after exposing a wound to contaminated seawater. People who have liver disease or a weak immune system are much more likely to become very ill from a Vibrio infection.

I have Vibrio. Can it make it harder for me to become pregnant?

It is not known if Vibrio can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does having/getting Vibrio increase the chance for miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. Studies have not been done to see if Vibrio increases the chance for miscarriage.

Does having/getting Vibrio increase the chance of birth defects?

Every pregnancy starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. Vibrio infection during pregnancy has not been well studied, so it is not known if Vibrio can harm a fetus.

Would having/getting Vibrio increase the chance of other pregnancy related problems?

Studies have not been done to see if Vibrio increases the chance for pregnancy-related problems such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37) or low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth). The symptoms of Vibrio infection (diarrhea and vomiting) can lead to dehydration which can be of concern for pregnancy.

Does having/getting Vibrio in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to see if Vibrio infection in pregnancy can cause behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while I have Vibrio:

Breast milk may help protect babies from many kinds of bacteria. One study has suggested that breastfeeding helped to reduce the risk of cholera in the infant whose mother was sick. Another study suggested that a common probiotic (bacteria) in breast milk helped to reduce the growth of Vibrio cholerae. Therefore, it may not be necessary to stop breastfeeding with a Vibrio infection. If a breastfeeding woman thinks she has a Vibrio infection, she should talk to her healthcare provider. If she suspects that the baby has symptoms, such as an infected wound, fever, or severe diarrhea, she should contact the child's healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a man has Vibrio, can it make it harder to get a woman pregnant or increase the chance of birth defects?

Studies have not been done to see if Vibrio could affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects. In general, exposures that fathers or sperm donors have are unlikely to increase the risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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