Vibrio

This sheet is about exposure to Vibrio in a pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information 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. 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 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.

How can I found 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 so the risk of infection should not be a concern.

Since eating raw or undercooked seafood has 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 that contains 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 dehydration. See a healthcare provider if it symptoms 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 treated, it can turn into a serious infection.

People usually get sick from Vibrio 1-3 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 seriously ill from a Vibrio infection. People that have symptoms should see a healthcare provider.

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 can occur in any pregnancy. 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, at any time, has not been well studied, so it is not known if Vibrio can harm a developing baby. The symptoms of Vibrio infection (diarrhea and vomiting) can lead to dehydration which can be of concern for pregnancy. Antibiotics that kill Vibrio bacteria have been used to treat Vibrio during pregnancy. If a person has a Vibrio infection, they should remind their healthcare provider that they are pregnant, and the healthcare provider can discuss treatment options.

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).

Does having/getting Vibrio in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?
Studies have not been done to see if Vibrio 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 when the breastfeeding person was sick. Another study suggested that a common probiotic (bacteria) in the 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 person thinks they have a Vibrio infection, they should talk to their healthcare provider. If they suspect that baby has symptoms, such as an infected wound, fever, or severe diarrhea, they should contact the child’s healthcare provider. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a male has Vibrio, can it make it harder to get a partner 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/.

What if the baby’s father has Vibrio?
In general, exposures that fathers have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/pdf/.

Please click here for references.