Update on *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* Infections — Alaska, 2005–2018

The largest number of *Vp* infection cases reported in any year was in 2018; eight of the 12 cases reported that year were associated with two small outbreaks linked to Alaska-grown oysters. Upon identifying the implicated oyster farms, DEC closed those areas to harvest, audited temperature monitoring logs, and worked with farmers to evaluate operations and take corrective actions. DEC also worked with secondary dealers and food services involved in the outbreak, reiterating appropriate handling and recordkeeping practices. Farmers were allowed to return to normal practices once they met criteria outlined in the *Alaska VP Interim Control Plan*.2

Table. Demographic Characteristics of Confirmed or Probable *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* Cases — Alaska, 2005–2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th># of cases (%)</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th># of cases (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anch/Mat-Su</td>
<td>19 (41%)</td>
<td>0–18</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf Coast</td>
<td>3 (7%)</td>
<td>19–34</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>15–49</td>
<td>1 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>50–64</td>
<td>16 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>12 (26%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

The fact that Alaska has not experienced a sizeable *Vp* outbreak subsequent to the 2004 outbreak may be due in large part to DEC’s effective implementation of a *Vp* Control Plan. Two small 2018 outbreaks identified during the summer of 2018 involved oysters grown in Southeast Alaska. In both situations, DEC staff quickly identified the implicated farms and closed the areas to harvest until corrective actions were taken.

DEC also plays an active role in ensuring interstate traceback involving oysters harvested out-of-state that are served in Alaska food establishments and linked to human illness.

Lastly, it is important to note that the *Vp* case counts reported here likely represent a subset of Alaska cases that actually occurred due to some degree of under-recognition and under-reporting of potential cases.

Recommendations

1. Health care providers and laboratories should report suspected and confirmed cases of *Vp* to SOE within 2 working days by fax (907-561-4293).
2. Consumers should be aware of the risks of eating raw oysters; adequately cooking oysters and other shellfish before consumption will kill *Vibrio* bacteria.
3. Shellfish dealers, food services, and markets that distribute, sell, or handle oysters should only accept oysters from permitted dealers, keep accurate records, and minimize “time out of temperature” control.2
4. Oyster harvesters should refer to and follow the *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* Control Plan produced and published by the Alaska DEC Food Safety and Sanitation Program.2

References

1. Morris JG Jr. Up to Date: *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* infections. (Updated 4/16/2018). Available at: https://www.uptodate.com/contents/vibrio-parahaemolyticus-infections
5. CDC. *Vibrio*: case definition (CDC). Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/conditons/vibriosis/case-definition/2017/

(Contributed by: Kathryn Helfrich, RN, MSN/MPH, SOE; and Kimberly Stryker, Jeremy Ayers, and Carol Brady, DEC Food Safety and Sanitation.)