



Charlie Crist
Governor

Ana M. Viamonte-Ros, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary of Health

PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

April 24, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jeannine Mallory, Public Information Officer
Pinellas County Health Department
727-824-6908 (media only)

Health Department Urges Caution in Eating Raw Oysters

The Pinellas County Health Department urges individuals – especially those in certain risk groups – to be careful in eating raw oysters, which often harbor the naturally occurring bacteria *Vibrio vulnificus*.

So far this year, there has been one death from *Vibrio vulnificus* and the consumption of raw oysters in Pinellas County, an elderly woman.

Those most at risk for developing serious illness from *Vibrio vulnificus* include heavy drinkers with liver damage and people with certain health conditions such as liver disease, diabetes, cancer, stomach disorders or any illness or treatment that weakens the immune system. People in these groups are also at risk of illness if they have wounds or cuts and wade in areas where the bacteria might be present in the water.

Thoroughly cooking oysters, either by frying, stewing or roasting, eliminates harmful bacteria and viruses in the meat. Consuming raw oysters that have undergone a post-harvest treatment process to eliminate the bacteria can also reduce the risk of illness.

Initial symptoms of *Vibrio vulnificus* infection can include mild nausea, vomiting or diarrhea followed by distinctive swollen skin lesions and septicemia (blood poisoning). Any individual who experiences these symptoms after consuming raw oysters should seek medical attention for diagnosis and treatment.

For more information, please visit the Florida Department of Health website at www.doh.state.fl.us and choose “Food and Waterborne Disease” from the subject list. You can also get information by visiting the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference website at www.issc.org. Choose “Education” from the subject list and then “*Vibrio vulnificus*.” Or visit the CDC’s “A-Z health topics” at <http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm>. Choose “*Vibrio vulnificus* infection.”

###

The Mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of our community through public and private partnerships in an environment that respects diversity.