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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NECROTIZING FASCIITIS (commonly called “flesh-eating bacteria”)



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Tampa, Fla. – Information has been circulating in the news media and on social media about an individual who developed an infection after visiting a Florida beach. The Florida Department of Health takes reports like this seriously and wants you to know the risks of necrotizing fasciitis.

- **Necrotizing fasciitis** (commonly called “flesh eating bacteria”) is a rare condition caused by more than one type of bacteria. Several bacteria that are common in our environment can cause this condition. The most common cause of necrotizing fasciitis is Group A strep.
- People do not “catch” necrotizing fasciitis; it is a complication or symptom of a bacterial infection that has not been promptly or properly treated.
- Sometimes *vibrio vulnificus* is called “flesh eating bacteria.” *Vibrio vulnificus* is a naturally occurring bacteria found in warm salty waters such as the Gulf of Mexico and surrounding bays. Concentrations of this bacteria are higher when the water is warmer.
- **Necrotizing fasciitis and severe infections with *vibrio vulnificus* are rare.** These infections can be treated with antibiotics and sometimes require surgery to remove damaged tissue. Rapid diagnosis is the key to effective treatment and recovery.
- Healthy people with a strong immune system who do not have fresh cuts, scrapes or breaks in the skin should be able to enjoy the water.

HOW TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF EXPOSURE

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages all people to avoid open bodies of water (such as the Gulf), pools and hot tubs with breaks in the skin. These can include cuts and scrapes, burns, insect

bites, puncture wounds, or surgical wounds.

- The Florida Department of Health and the CDC encourage good wound care as the best way to prevent **any** bacterial skin infection. Keep open wounds covered with clean, dry bandages until healed and don't delay first aid of even minor, non-infected wounds like blisters, scrapes or any break in the skin.
- You can prevent these types of infections when at the beach or bay by:
 - Avoiding walking, sitting, or swimming in Gulf or bay waters with open wounds.
 - Properly cleaning and treating wounds after accidentally exposing a wound to Gulf or bay waters, getting injured while in the water or getting an injury while cleaning or handling seafood.
 - Rinsing with fresh water after swimming can additionally reduce the risk of exposure.
 - Seeking medical treatment immediately if you develop signs or symptoms of an infection (redness, swelling, fever, severe pain in area of red or swollen skin) near or around a wound.
- People with the greatest risk of exposure to bacteria in water bodies, pools or hot tubs are very young children, the elderly (more than 64 years old), and people with chronic diseases and/or weakened immune systems since their ability to fight off infection can be limited by disease or age. This doesn't mean you can't enjoy the Gulf, bay, pools or hot tubs. Rather you are encouraged to monitor your overall health and skin condition for possible signs of infection.
- It is important for individuals receiving medical care to let their doctor know of any recent exposure to Gulf or bay waters, pools or hot tubs. Timely treatment is necessary to prevent serious complications.

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