"Vibrio vulnificus is a deadly bacteria that eats you inside out like gangrene. Seventeen years ago I took my father out to a dinner of raw oysters that killed him. I had to watch that sweet kind man die like a dog. Since then I've been working with the S.T.O.P. organization to have protective measures put in place so others won't have to go through what my family did. Kudos to the FDA for finally requiring procedures to ensure the safety of Gulf oysters. And shame on any elected official who would get in the way of this overdue public health protection. The only good oyster is a safe oyster and FDA's action will save limbs and lives." Vicki Peal Wilton Manors, Florida Loving daughter of Eric Rosenwald, d.1992 at age 80 The woman behind the long-standing restaurant notice in Florida warning consumers of the risk of consuming Gulf Coast oysters

## Case Histories on Vibrio vulnificus Infections

**Darrell Dishon**, Lebanon, OH, age 40. Mr. Dishon, a diabetic, was in Panama City, FL, for his wedding in July 2009 and ate raw oysters at a beach oyster bar. The day before his wedding he began vomiting and experiencing stomach cramps. He spent his wedding day in the hospital with septicemia where he was placed in a medically induced coma and his legs were amputated to save his life. About Florida he says, "It used to be one of my favorite places because I had family there. Now it reminds me I'll never have legs again."

**James Sartwell**, Baton Rouge, LA, age 60. Mr. Sartwell was a veteran of the Gulf War and recently retired from a career of military service. On October 1, 2007, he went out to celebrate his 60th birthday at a local restaurant, ordering raw oysters. Three days later he experienced stomach pain and went into the hospital where he was diagnosed with septicemia. Doctors sedated Sartwell for the pain and he died without regaining consciousness after 11 days in ICU on October 15, 2007. Mr. Sartwell's daughter Jennie Bourgeois has become a tireless advocate for safer oysters.

**Unnamed woman**, Atlanta, GA, age 52. A 52 year old woman died August 10, 2007, only four days after an afternoon meal of nine raw oysters and cooked crab. The oysters from the Gulf of Mexico were contaminated with *Vibrio vulnificus*.

**Name withheld**, Denver, CO, age 32. The victim had no underlying medical condition. He ate raw oysters on November 20, 2004 and suffered a severe infection by *Vibrio vulnificus*. As a result, he lost both of his legs above the knee and now only has partial use of his hands.

**Gene Dixon**, North Richland Hills, TX, age 53. Mr. Dixon went out with his wife for a lunch of clam chowder and a half-dozen raw oysters on the half shell July 6, 2002. The next evening he complained of not feeling well. By morning, he had a fever and pain in his legs and within hours exhibited blisters. By the time he reached his doctor his legs were black and blue and hurt so much that he cried when anyone touched them. He died five days later.

**Dorothy Vowell**, Little Rock, AR, age 65. Ms. Vowell ate six raw oysters at a local restaurant on June 22, 2001. Within 12 hours she became ill and two days later died in the Baptist Hospital emergency room from acute septicemia caused by *Vibrio vulnificus*.

**William W. Gillespie**, Prattville, AL, age 68. Mr. Gillespie was with his wife for a gambling weekend in Biloxi, MS. On June 6, 2000, he ate about a dozen oysters. The family cut their visit short when Mr. Gillespie was seized with cramps. After returning home, black blisters appeared over his body and his legs turned purplish. Doctors amputated his legs and peeled the skin from 20 percent of his body in an attempt to save his life. He died of *Vibrio vulnificus* infection on his wife's birthday after 10 days in the hospital. His daughter-in-law Stephanie said, "No one in our family had ever heard of the bacteria. I don't know where the states went with their educational campaigns, but it wasn't anywhere that I've been."

**Eric Rosenwald**, Wilton Manners, FL, age 80. Mr. Rosenwald went out for a dinner of fresh seafood at one of his favorite restaurants in 1992 and as an appetizer ordered raw oysters on the half shell. His family had never seen him eat raw oysters before. The following Monday he started feeling ill, complained of pain and couldn't speak without slurring his words. In the hospital his condition steadily worsened. Over the next few hours, one lung collapsed and he could no longer speak. Soon his blood pressure dropped precipitously and, finally, his heart stopped beating. Mr. Rosenwald died just three days after he and his family had shared their seafood dinner.

**Unnamed man**, Mobile, AL, age 46. A man with a history of liver disease came into an Alabama hospital with complaints of abdominal pain, nausea, chills, and skin lesions on his extremities. His symptoms had started suddenly and within 24 hours of becoming ill, lesions formed with difficult-to-control bleeding. Biopsies of the fluid-filled blisters (known as bullae) on his lower extremities identified *Vibrio vulnificus*. He began a 14-day course of antibiotics and underwent daily skin debridement to treat his leg lesions. The man recalled eating raw oysters three days before the onset of his illness. After completing antibiotic therapy, he was discharged in stable condition.

The victims' stories told here are gathered from press reports, public records and direct contacts to CSPI from victims or their families. Where possible they are confirmed against yearly Vibrio vulnificus illness reports compiled by FDA.

Compiled: November 9, 2009