

# FDA Advises Consumers to Avoid Potentially Contaminated Fresh Crab Meat Imported from Venezuela due to *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*

July 13, 2018

*The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state and local partners, are investigating a multi-state outbreak of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* illnesses that are linked to fresh, crab meat.*

## What is the Problem and What is being Done About It?

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is working with federal, state, and local officials regarding a *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* outbreak linked to fresh crab meat from Venezuela. At this time, the FDA is advising consumers to avoid eating fresh crab meat from Venezuela, as it may be contaminated with *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*. Consumers are advised to ask where their crab meat is from, if dining out at a restaurant or in grocery stores. This product is commonly found in plastic tubs and may be labeled as “pre-cooked.” As this is an ongoing investigation, the FDA will share additional updates as soon as information becomes available. The FDA and the states are conducting an investigation to determine the source of contaminated fresh crab meat and ensure it is removed from the food supply. Retailers should not serve or sell fresh crab meat imported from Venezuela.

As of July 12, 2018, there are 12 cases of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*. The states reporting cases associated with this outbreak include Maryland (8), Louisiana (2), Pennsylvania (1), and the District of Columbia (1). Four of these cases are confirmed matches to the outbreak strain by Pulsed Field Gel Electrophoresis (PFGE), which is a type of DNA fingerprinting. All four of these confirmed cases are in Maryland. Four people (33%) have been hospitalized. Illnesses started on dates ranging from April 1, 2018 to July 3, 2018.

Food contaminated with *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* may look, smell, and taste normal.

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## What are the Symptoms of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*?

Most people infected with *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* develop diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, nausea, fever and stomach pain. Diarrhea tends to be watery and occasionally bloody.

## How Soon After Exposure do Symptoms Appear?

Most people infected with *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* develop symptoms after approximately 24 hours, but timing can vary.

## Who is at Risk?

Anyone who consumes raw or undercooked shellfish is at risk of contracting *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*; however, the product under current investigation is a fresh, pre-cooked product

that may be served chilled or lightly re-heated in various dishes. Children younger than five, the elderly, and those people with weakened immune systems are more likely to have severe infections.

## What Do Restaurants and Retailers Need To Do?

Restaurants and retailers should not serve or sell imported fresh crab meat from Venezuela. Restaurants and retailers should dispose of fresh crab meat from Venezuela, including cooked crab meat, by throwing it in the garbage or returning to their distributor for destruction.

Restaurants and retailers should also be aware that the fresh crab meat may be a source of pathogens and should control the potential for cross-contamination of food processing equipment and the food processing environment. They should follow the steps below:

- Wash hands with warm water and soap following the cleaning and sanitation process.
- Retailers, restaurants, and other food service operators who have processed and packaged any potentially contaminated products need to be concerned about cross contamination of cutting surfaces and utensils through contact with the potentially contaminated products.
- Retailers that have sold bulk product should clean and sanitize the containers used to hold the product.
- Regular frequent cleaning and sanitizing of food contact surfaces and utensils used in food preparation may help to minimize the likelihood of cross-contamination.

## What Do Consumers Need To Do?

People should not eat any fresh crab meat from Venezuela. Consumers should check the label on the crab meat that was purchased at the retail level or verify in restaurants to ensure that it is not imported from Venezuela. If a consumer purchased fresh crab imported from Venezuela, he or she should throw the product in the garbage.

The FDA advises that consumers should ask where their crab meat is from, if dining out at a restaurant or in grocery stores. If the origin of the crab meat is unknown, the FDA recommends not eating it. This imported crab meat is commonly found in plastic tubs.

People who think they might have become ill from eating possibly contaminated crab meat should talk to their health care providers.

Consumers should always practice safe food handling and preparation measures. Wash hands, utensils, and surfaces with hot, soapy water before and after handling food.

For food preparation surfaces and food cutting utensils that may have come in contact with potentially contaminated crab meat, it is very important that consumers thoroughly clean these areas and items.

For general food safety advice regarding fish and shellfish, here are some steps you can take to prevent *Vibrio*:

- When ordering shellfish in restaurants, ask that they be fully cooked unless they have been treated with a method to reduce *Vibrio* (such as pressure treatment).
- Keep raw foods from touching cooked foods and surfaces used for cooking and eating.

## **Who Should be Contacted?**

People who think they might have become ill from eating possibly contaminated crabmeat should talk to their health care providers. Contact your healthcare provider if you have diarrhea that lasts for more than 3 days, or is accompanied by high fever, blood in the stool, or so much vomiting that you cannot keep liquids down and you pass very little urine.

The FDA encourages consumers with questions about food safety to call 1-888-SAFEFOOD or consult the fda.gov website: <http://www.fda.gov>.