INFORMATION ABOUT NECROTIZING FASCIITIS

- Information has been circulating on social media/media outlets of an individual who developed an infection after visiting our region. The Florida Department of Health is taking this issue seriously and are working with the Indiana Department of Health to determine if this infection was caused by bacteria such as *Vibrio vulnificus* or other reportable disease. Currently, we do not have any information about this individual's illness.

- Necrotizing fasciitis (many times called "flesh eating bacteria" by the media) is caused by more than one type of bacteria. Several bacteria, 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 people call *Vibrio vulnificus* the "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.

- If you are healthy with a strong immune system, your chances of developing or having complications due to this condition are extremely low.

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 with warm water and soap after:
        - Accidentally exposing a wound to Gulf or bay waters,
        - Getting an injured while in the water, or
        - Getting an injury while cleaning or handling seafood.
- 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.

INFORMATION ABOUT NECROTIZING FASCIITIS

- People with the greatest risk of exposure to bacteria in water bodies, pools or hots tubs are very young children, the elderly (>64 years old), and people with chronic diseases and/or weaken 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.