

# Researchers say flesh-eating bacteria in the Ala Wai Canal may triple

Hawaii Public Radio | By [Sabrina Bodon](#)

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Levels of a flesh-eating bacteria in the Ala Wai Canal may triple by the end of the century, according to new University of Hawai'i research released earlier this week.

The bacteria, known as *Vibrio vulnificus*, affects relatively few people each year, but it can lead to hospitalization and death in certain cases.

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa researchers studied data such as rainfall, water temperature and dissolved matter in the canal to reach their conclusions.

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Researchers say the bacteria thrives in warmer conditions, and climate change is expected to raise the temperature of water in the canal.



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Lead researcher Jessica Bullington, who is now a doctoral student at Stanford University, said there is no immediate danger posed by bacteria levels in the canal.

“The next steps are to make these predictions accessible and communicate the risk of infection, both for short-term use and adaptation to the impacts of climate change,” Bullington said. She was previously at the UH School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology Department of Oceanography during the research.

Based on rainfall projections, they say conditions are ripe for populations of the bacteria to triple in the future.

Bullington said the study could be used to help better manage waterways as climate change evolves and provide information about increased risks of infection to those coming into contact with the water.

“Ultimately, we wanted to generate something that would be useful for people,” Bullington said. “This project is a great example of one of the many ways in which our departmental expertise can be of service for our local community and coastal management.”

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