



BC Centre for Disease Control  
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

## Food Premises Serving Raw Oysters and other Bivalve Shellfish

*In 2015, 62 people became ill with *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* after eating raw oysters*

*Vibrio parahaemolyticus (Vp)* is a naturally occurring bacteria present in the ocean. When ocean water temperatures get warmer in the summer, levels of Vp increase in the ocean and in oysters.

*Vp present in the oyster meat can grow to levels that will make people sick if oysters are incorrectly stored at warm temperatures.*

**Marine biotoxins** that cause paralytic, amnesic and diarrhetic shellfish poisoning can also occur naturally in raw oysters and other bivalve shellfish, such as clams, scallops and mussels.

**Cooking does not destroy toxins in bivalve shellfish.**

To reduce the risk that your food premises will serve contaminated shellfish, in addition to basic food safety procedures, follow these steps when handling oysters and other bivalve shellfish:

- ✓ **Check that incoming shipments of raw shellfish are received in ice or with cold-packs.** Shellfish **must** be 4°C or colder. **Is the ice melted? Check the temperature and if the oysters/shellfish are warmer than 4°C REJECT SHIPMENT.** Temperature abuse of oysters increases the likelihood that oysters contaminated with Vp can make someone sick.
- ✓ **Record the receiving temperature** for accepted products, monitor & record onsite storage temperatures at regular intervals.
- ✓ **Put the delivered product into refrigeration** immediately upon receipt (at 4°C or colder).
- ✓ **Delivery trucks for raw shellfish should be refrigerated.** Check incoming trucks when possible.
- ✓ **Store shellfish at 4°C or colder** until just prior to preparing them.
- ✓ **Minimize the time oysters are out of refrigeration during preparation** such as during washing periods. Ideally, oysters for raw consumption should be prepared when they are ordered.
- ✓ **Serve smaller batches to minimize the time oysters are out of refrigeration during consumption.** When customers order large numbers of raw oysters, bring the oysters out in smaller numbers, then replace with fresh oysters as they are consumed. This will minimize the time oysters are out of refrigeration before being eaten.
- ✓ **Serve and display raw oysters on ice** cup side down. Replenish the ice if it melts, and place oysters cup side down, so natural fluids in the live oyster stay inside the shell when the oyster breathes and opens its shell. When serving oysters on the half-shell to customers, ensure they remain cold until eaten - many food premises put them on ice.
- ✓ **Buy oysters/shellfish from approved suppliers with shellfish tags for each lot.** This ensures shellfish are harvested from open (safe government monitored) areas and were properly handled after harvesting. By law, all shellfish must be obtained from a federally registered shellfish processing plant.
- ✓ **Keep shellfish tags and invoices for a minimum of 3 months** after they are served (fresh or frozen).
- ✓ **Write the date you start serving oysters/shellfish on the tag** or in a log receipt book or invoice.

For additional information on handling shellfish safely, talk to your Environmental Health Officer or go to <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/food-your-health/fish-shellfish>.