

Vibrio parahaemolyticus

Vibrio parahaemolyticus (Vp) is a bacterium that is normally found in ocean water. When the water temperature increases in the summer, Vp proliferate in the water and concentrate in bivalve shellfish such as clams, oysters and mussels. People can get a gastro-intestinal infection by eating contaminated raw shellfish or by accidentally swallowing ocean water. They can also get ear or wound infections from contact with contaminated ocean water.

In 2015, BC experienced its largest Vp outbreak ever reported; 60 cases were associated with the consumption of raw BC oysters and another 13 cases were associated with exposure to BC ocean water. The outbreak lasted from week 24 (June 15) to week 36 (September 9), with an earlier start, an earlier peak and a longer season than in previous years (Figure 3.1). This outbreak also affected other provinces with a total of 82 cases Vp cases associated with BC oysters reported across Canada. The early season and high incidence were attributed to higher than average BC ocean water temperatures.

A series of communications and control measures were taken to minimise the public health risk. These

included a public health alert, education of BC restaurant staff and posting of warnings in restaurants about the risks associated with consumption of raw BC oysters and an order to stop serving raw BC oysters in one Health Authority. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency recalled oysters intended for raw consumption that were harvested from BC waters and required testing of all lots of BC oysters intended for raw consumption. The incidence of Vp decreased rapidly from the beginning of August (week 31) onwards. The outbreak was declared over on September 17.

In the ensuing months, a National Vp Control Working Group, including the BCCDC, BC Health Authorities, BC Ministry of Agriculture, BC Shellfish Growers' Association, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada developed a series of recommendations to address gaps and improve surveillance, control and communications in order to decrease the risk of Vp associated with BC oysters.

3.1 2015 *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* Reports Compared to Historical Median and the 10th and 90th Percentiles Around the Median (2006 to 2014)

