

THE DANGERS OF ILLEGAL HARVESTING

ENJOY SAFE SHELLFISH – CHECK BEFORE YOU HARVEST

Bivalve molluscan shellfish have two hinged shells and include oysters, clams, scallops, mussels, and cockles. Because bivalve shellfish feed by filtering microscopic plankton from the water, changes in water quality can result in unsafe marine biotoxins, bacteria, or viruses building up in their tissue.



The Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program (CSSP) is designed to minimize the health risks associated with the consumption of contaminated bivalve molluscan shellfish. The program is delivered by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Environment Canada.

The CSSP routinely monitors the level of marine biotoxins, bacteria and other harmful contaminants and closes bivalve shellfish areas when levels of these substances exceed safe limits.

While the CSSP has controls in place to prevent contaminated bivalve shellfish from reaching consumers, harvesters also have a role to play by maintaining safe practices. There can be serious consequences if bivalve shellfish are harvested from an area that is closed for harvesting.

Harvesting shellfish from closed or prohibited areas is illegal

Apart from risks to human health, illegally harvesting bivalve shellfish can also damage the reputation of the Canadian bivalve shellfish industry and harvesters who work hard to provide a safe, high quality product.

Areas that have been assessed and determined to be contaminated are generally clearly marked by signs. However, if you are planning to harvest bivalve shellfish, it is **your** responsibility to check with the nearest Fisheries and Oceans Canada office to find out whether the area is closed.

Harvesting of shellfish is prohibited within 125 metres (410 feet) of a wharf, aquaculture operation (salmon growing cages) or floating accommodation, such as a float home.

Eating contaminated shellfish can cause potentially serious or fatal illness. Consumers should be aware of potential food safety issues associated with eating bivalve shellfish:

MARINE BIOTOXINS

Biotoxins, if present in the water, can accumulate in bivalve shellfish. Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP), Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning (ASP) and Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP) are the most common illnesses associated with marine biotoxins in Canada. **Even cooked shellfish can still contain biotoxins.**

Symptoms of PSP include tingling and numbness of the lips, tongue, hands and feet, drowsiness, dizziness, headache and difficulty swallowing. In severe cases, this can proceed to incoherent speech, difficulty walking, muscle paralysis, respiratory paralysis, and death.



Symptoms of ASP include severe nausea, vomiting and diarrhea within six hours, muscle weakness, disorientation, memory loss, abdominal pain, and dizziness.

DSP symptoms include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and cramps.

BACTERIA AND VIRUSES

Bacteria and viruses that may be present in the water in which shellfish live are capable of causing illness in humans. These include: *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp), Norovirus, and Hepatitis A.

Vp is a naturally occurring bacterium found in our coastal waters. The presence of Vp can increase in warm waters to levels that can make people sick, particularly during the summer months. Symptoms of an infection of Vp include diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, nausea, vomiting, fever, and headache.

Norovirus symptoms include diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, nausea, vomiting, fatigue and fever.

Hepatitis A symptoms can include abdominal discomfort, nausea, fatigue, fever, and jaundice. Persons with liver conditions are at risk for more serious illness.

On the web, visit the Shellfish Safety page at: www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/sustainable-durable/aquaculture/safety-shellfish-eng.htm

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

How can I avoid getting sick or causing illness in others from unsafe bivalve shellfish?

The single most effective method of avoiding illness is responsible harvesting. Ensure that bivalve shellfish you harvest come only from open harvest areas.

What is meant by a “closed” area?

When an area is officially “closed,” it is illegal and unsafe to harvest in that area. As a general rule, areas that have been assessed and deemed contaminated are clearly posted with signs indicating the area is closed. It is your responsibility to find out if an area is closed to shellfish harvesting.

How can I find out if an area is safe for harvesting?

Your first line of defense is to scan the area for signs that indicate the area is closed to bivalve shellfish harvesting. These signs are generally posted in areas most accessible to the public. Notices about the closing of harvest areas are also communicated to the fishing industry and the public through direct communications with bivalve shellfish harvesters, processors, local media, and the Fisheries and Oceans Canada website. Harvesters can also access the most up-to-date information from their local Fisheries and Oceans Canada offices.

PACIFIC (BRITISH COLUMBIA)

Telephone: 604-666-0384 or 1-866-431-3474

QUEBEC

Telephone: 418-648-2239
www.mollusca.gc.ca

GULF (ALL WATERS ADJACENT TO NEW BRUNSWICK, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND AND NOVA SCOTIA IN THE SOUTHERN GULF OF ST-LAWRENCE)

Telephone: 506-851-6227

MARITIMES (ALL WATERS ADJACENT TO NOVA SCOTIA ON THE ATLANTIC COAST AND BAY OF FUNDY (INCLUDING NEW BRUNSWICK))

Telephone: 902-426-3550

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Telephone: 709-772-4423

What do I do if I feel sick after eating shellfish?

Anyone who feels sick after eating bivalve shellfish should seek medical assistance. Individuals who feel ill should also contact their local public health department to report their illness.

