



News Release

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Shellfish-related illnesses can be prevented – important summer safety tips

OLYMPIA — Warm weather and low tides are good for harvesting shellfish, but nice weather is also ideal for naturally-occurring bacteria to multiply, raising the risk of illness. The Department of Health advises Washington’s shellfish consumers to follow summertime health advice as they head to area beaches to gather shellfish.

“Sunshine and warming waters are ideal conditions for the bacteria that cause vibriosis to multiply,” explains Jerrod Davis, director of the Office of Shellfish and Water Protection. “This raises the risk of getting sick from eating raw or undercooked shellfish – especially oysters.”

People who gather their own shellfish can follow simple tips to avoid getting ill. Make sure oysters are placed on ice or refrigerated immediately after they are picked. Harvest shellfish as the tide goes out and don’t take shellfish that have been exposed by the receding tide for more than an hour. Cook shellfish thoroughly, especially in the summer months, because the *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* bacteria are killed when shellfish have reached 145° F for 15 seconds. Don’t rinse cooked shellfish with seawater because it can be re-contaminated with *Vibrio*.

Vibriosis symptoms usually appear within 24 hours of eating infected shellfish and may include diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, headache, fever, and chills. Symptoms typically last between two to seven days. People with lowered immunity, liver disease, stomach ulcers, or who take medication to reduce stomach acid are at higher risk for severe illness and should never eat raw or undercooked shellfish.

Not all shellfish illnesses can be prevented by cooking. Biotoxins are also found in Washington waters and are not destroyed by cooking. Always call the Shellfish Safety Hotline at 1-800-562-5632 or check the [clickable map website](#) to learn about shellfish closures or health warnings.

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