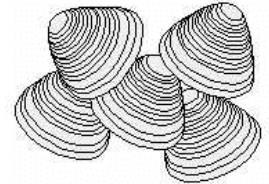


The Risk of Eating Raw Oysters or Clams

Did you know ...?

Raw shellfish can carry disease-causing bacteria, viruses, and other organisms. Eating raw or undercooked oysters or clams carrying *Vibrio* bacteria can cause serious illness or even death.



How can you become ill?

You can become ill by eating raw or undercooked oysters or clams carrying *Vibrio* bacteria. If the oysters or clams are cooked thoroughly, the *Vibrio* bacteria are destroyed and there is no risk of infection. Eating raw oysters or clams with hot sauce or while drinking alcohol does not destroy the bacteria. Infection can also occur when cuts, burns, or sores come in contact with seawater containing *Vibrio* bacteria.

Who is at the most risk for illness?

Individuals with any of the conditions listed below are in a “high risk” category. Older adults are more likely to have one or more of these conditions and should consult their physician and be aware of their health status before eating raw oysters or clams.

- Liver disease
- Excessive alcohol use
- Gastric disorders
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Kidney disease
- Taking medications which reduce stomach acid or impair liver function
- Any illness or medical treatment which results in a compromised immune system
- Diabetes
- AIDS or HIV infection
- Cancer
- Long-term steroid use
- Abnormal iron metabolism

What are the Symptoms?

Symptoms of *Vibrio* infection usually appear within 24-48 hours of exposure and can include any of the following:

- Stomach pain / nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever / chills
- Severe weakness
- Shock
- Skin rashes, blisters, or lesions

If you have consumed raw shellfish and have any of these symptoms, seek medical treatment **immediately**. It is important to remember that severe *Vibrio* infection can lead to death within two days. Early aggressive antibiotic treatment is the most effective therapy.

(continued on back)



Eleven offices serving the residents of Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties
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Tri-County Health Department services are provided without regard to race, color, sex, gender, religion, national origin or disability.

TCHD: EPC/DC-60 (9/10)

Risks of Eating Raw Oysters/Clams (continued)

What can you do?

If you are at high risk:

- NEVER eat raw shellfish
- ALWAYS choose cooked oysters or clams when dining out
- ALWAYS cook oysters and clams thoroughly
- NEVER swim or wade in saltwater with open wounds or sores
- Get more information by calling the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hotline at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (1-888-723-3366), your local or state health agencies, or your physician.

If you are not at high risk:

- Microorganisms carried by raw shellfish can also cause illness in healthy people
- Choose cooked oysters or clams when dining out or eating at home

Tips for cooking oysters and clams

Cooking shellfish to an internal temperature of 140° F or more for 4-6 minutes will destroy the common microorganisms of public health concern.

Oysters and clams in the shell:

- Boil live oysters in boiling water for 3 to 5 minutes after shells open. Use small pots to boil or steam oysters. Do not cook too many oysters in the same pot because the ones in the middle may not get fully cooked. Discard any oysters that do not open during cooking.
- Steam live oysters for 4 to 9 minutes in a steamer that is already steaming.

Shucked oysters and clams:

- Boil or simmer for at least 3 minutes or until edges curl.
- Fry in oil for at least 3 minutes at 375° F.
- Broil 3 inches from heat for 3 minutes.
- Bake for 10 minutes at 450° F.