



# IMPORTANT INFORMATION

## for Florida's Hospitality Industry



**ATTENTION: PUBLIC FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS**

Number: 2000-01

Date: 2000 May 25

**SUBJECT: Raw Oysters Health Risk – 2000**

Susan R. McKinley  
Division Director

*Vibrio vulnificus* is a bacterium that lives in warm coastal seawater and occurs naturally in raw or undercooked oysters. Warm weather months, typically from June to October, are when *vulnificus* concentrations in seawater are highest. Symptoms include gastrointestinal illness, fever, or shock following the ingestion of raw seafood, especially oysters. In recent years, this bacterium has caused increasing health problems for certain people who are at a higher risk of infection.

Those in high risk categories are 200 times more likely to die from eating *Vibrio* and include people with liver disease, chronic alcohol use, diabetes, kidney disease, inflammatory bowel disease, certain cancers, hemochromatosis (an iron disorder), long-term steroid use (as for asthma and arthritis), and other immune-compromised diseases. Older adults may also be at greater risk than younger people. **People in these high risk categories should not consume raw shellfish.**

Currently there is no method to assure that oysters are safe since even legally harvested oysters can be contaminated. *Vibrio vulnificus* does not alter the appearance, taste, or odor of oysters. To eliminate the risk of infection from *Vibrio vulnificus* either: Do not eat raw oysters or other raw shellfish; or be sure to cook shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels) thoroughly. Thorough cooking can be achieved by: a) boiling until the shells open and continue boiling for five more minutes; or b) steam until the shells open and then continue cooking for nine more minutes. Do not eat those shellfish that do not open during cooking. Boil shucked oysters at least three minutes, or fry them in oil at least ten minutes at 375°F.

To reduce the risks for those persons who could be affected, food service establishments that serve raw oysters must warn their patrons. This warning may be on menus, table placards, or elsewhere **in plain view of all patrons** and must be worded as follows [64D-3.013(6)(a), Florida Administrative Code]:

**CONSUMER INFORMATION**

There is risk associated with consuming raw oysters. If you have chronic illness of the liver, stomach or blood, or have immune disorders, you are at greater risk of serious illness from raw oysters, and should eat oysters fully cooked. If unsure of your risk, consult a physician.

Literature advertising oysters and clams as a “purified” product must be considered with caution. Statements by facilities that their product has been “purified” are misleading relative to actual product purity and safety. Some facilities making such advertising claims use a process called wet storage that is a quality enhancement process that results in the removal of mud and sand, and the adjustment of salt content for ideal flavor. Neither purging (depuration) nor low heat treatment (heat shock) of oyster shellstock will completely eliminate *Vibrio vulnificus*. Irradiation of oysters is effective, but is not in widespread use and drastically reduces shelf life.

### THOROUGHLY COOKED OYSTERS ARE SAFE FOR EVERYONE.

For more information, please call the Department of Business and Professional Regulation, Division of Hotels and Restaurants, at 800—749—6368 or visit our website at [www.hospitalityeducation.org](http://www.hospitalityeducation.org)

Related links include the FDA Bad Bug Book: <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~mow/intro.html> and *Vibrio Vulnificus* in the National Food Safety Database: <http://www.foodsafety.org/wheel/ww4690.htm>

## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL REGULATION

Jeb Bush, Governor

Division of Hotels and Restaurants  
[www.hospitalityeducation.org](http://www.hospitalityeducation.org)

Cynthia A. Henderson, Secretary