



Oregon Health Authority Warns of the Risks of Eating Contaminated Raw Oysters

Summer is here — and so is the time for backyard BBQs, warm days at the beach and delicacies from the sea. With the warm weather comes for some a favorite food: raw oysters. Before you consume this food, you should be aware that eating raw oysters contaminated with *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, a naturally-occurring bacterium in the ocean bays of the Pacific Northwest, may make you sick. *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* is found in higher concentrations during the summer months as water becomes warmer; cases of disease caused by this bacterium are now being reported in Oregon.

People at Greater Risk

Persons who have diabetes, cancer, stomach disease, iron overload disease, liver disease, or any illness or medical treatment that weakens the body's immune system are at greater risk for *Vibrio* infection than others. The Oregon Health Authority advises these individuals not to eat raw oysters at all.

Am I Infected?

Symptoms of *Vibrio* infection typically begin 24–48 hours after eating a contaminated product. Symptoms may include diarrhea (sometimes bloody), abdominal cramps, fever and chills. If you develop such an illness after eating raw oysters, consider seeking medical attention, and inform the doctor or nurse that you've eaten raw oysters.

Reducing the Risk

"Some people hope that adding lime juice or hot sauce to raw oysters will kill the *Vibrio* bacteria," said Paul Cieslak, MD, Medical Director of the Oregon Health Authority's communicable disease section. "That's wishful thinking. If you don't cook them, you're taking a risk." Cieslak advised that the safest option was to eat only oysters that have been cooked. "Regrettably, neither acidic nor alcoholic beverages will kill *Vibrio*," said Cieslak.

Precautions When Eating Oysters

At Restaurants:

- Order oysters fully cooked.

Cooking at Home:

- When you purchase oysters, the shells should be closed. Throw away any oysters with shells already opened.
- In the shell: After the shells open, boil live oysters for another 3–5 minutes. 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.
- In a steamer: Add oysters to water that is already steaming, and cook live oysters for another 4–9 minutes.

Shucked Oysters:

- Boil or simmer shucked oysters for at least 3 minutes or until the edges curl.
- Fry at 375 degrees F for at least 3 minutes.
- Broil 3 inches from the heat for 3 minutes.
- Bake at 450 degrees F for 10 minutes.