

# The Safety Zone



AmTrust North America  
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An AmTrust North America Loss Control Newsletter

## Oyster Bars



An oyster bar, also known as an oyster saloon, oyster house or a raw bar, is a food service term that describes a restaurant specializing in serving oysters, or a section of a restaurant which serves oysters buffet-style.

Oyster is a common name for a number of different families of saltwater clams, bivalve mollusks that live in marine or brackish habitats. Some kinds of oysters are commonly consumed, cooked or raw, as a delicacy. True oysters are members of the family Ostreidae. This family includes the edible oysters, which mainly belong to the genera *Ostrea*, *Crassostrea*, *Ostreola*, and *Saccostrea*. Examples include the Belon oyster, eastern oyster, Olympia oyster, Pacific oyster, and the Sydney rock oyster.

### Exposure

Raw oysters can contain bacterial pathogens such as vibrio vulnificus, vibrio parahaemolyticus, e.coli, viral hepatitis or Norwalk virus (norovirus). The elderly, young and those with compromised immune systems typically lose limbs and have around a 50% survival rate if they eat raw oysters and get sick – especially from *V. vulnificus*. These type of claims can be expensive.

Of around a dozen *Vibrio* species that cause disease in people, two species — *V. parahaemolyticus* and *V. vulnificus* — are most often associated with eating raw or undercooked seafood, particularly molluscan shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels, and cockles). These bacteria can also enter through a wound or by ingesting seawater, but these cases are less common.

*V. parahaemolyticus* usually causes watery diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal pain, sometimes with a fever and chills. People are usually sick for three days, and though unpleasant, the majority of people recover just fine, without needing prescription medications. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates there are 35,000 *V. parahaemolyticus* cases a year in the U.S.

*V. vulnificus* is a rarer but more sinister creature and is often associated with fatalities. Most people with *V. vulnificus* experience symptoms similar to *V. parahaemolyticus*, but the bacteria are a particular threat to those who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions such as liver disease, diabetes, or cancer. In these patients, the bacteria can enter the bloodstream (septicemia), causing severe fever, skin lesions, and shock. Around 50 percent of these patients die, and that is often in the face of aggressive antibiotic treatment and supportive care, which is more than a little scary. *V. vulnificus* infection is, however, a rare disease; there are only about 30 cases a year in the U.S.

Unfortunately, *Vibrio* cases have been on the rise, and according to CDC's most recent Food Safety Progress Report, we saw a 75-percent increase in cases in 2013 compared to 2006-2008, and a 32-percent increase compared to 2010-2012 in the U.S. The majority of these 2013 cases (62 percent, or 144 cases) were *V. parahaemolyticus*, and 9 percent (21 cases) were *V. vulnificus*. It is also believed that for every *V. parahaemolyticus* case that is reported, there are 142 cases that go undiagnosed. <http://www.foodsafetynews.com/2015/04/seafood-safety-101-vibrio-in-shellfish>

*V. vulnificus* is found in all of the coastal waters of the United States with oysters least likely to be contaminated with *Vibrio vulnificus* during the months of December through February. They are most likely to be contaminated during the months of April through October, when 85% of illness has occurred.

## Loss Control

- 1. All raw shellfish must be post-harvest production.** This does not eliminate the exposure 100%, but reduces the exposure. Post-harvest treatment/processing is most important for Oysters since oysters are most often consumed raw and the vast majority of the losses occurring from raw shellfish has involved raw oysters.

Post-Harvest Production kills spoilage bacteria, thereby extending shelf life and maintaining freshness and quality. Three technologies are currently utilized; individual quick freezing, heat-cool pasteurization, and high hydrostatic pressure. [http://safeoysters.uga.edu/educators/Post-Harvest\\_Processed\\_Oysters.pdf](http://safeoysters.uga.edu/educators/Post-Harvest_Processed_Oysters.pdf) However, because these processes may not kill all bacteria and viruses, it is not recommended that high-risk patients eat raw, post-harvest processed (PHP) oysters.

Post-Harvest Production oysters are tagged with a blue oyster tag. When the tag is BLUE it means that the bacterial *V. Vulnificus* has been reduced to non-detectable levels.

- 2. Raw food warnings should be included in both menus and on-premises.** Some jurisdictions have specific guidelines and wording.



### Sample

*There is a 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.*

- 3. Required raw oyster documentation must be followed.** Raw shucked shellfish shall be obtained in containers / sacks which are:

- Labeled with the name, address, and certification number of the shucker/packer or re-packer of the shucked shellfish; and
- A "sell-by" date on containers less than ½ gallon in size, or a "shucked" date on containers ½ gallon or more in size.
- The sack should be in good condition.
- Sacks should be refrigerated upon receiving.

### Tags and Label Retention

- The tags or labels attached to a shellfish container must be kept attached to the container until it is empty.

- All food service establishments must keep shellfish tags or labels on file for a minimum of 90 days.
- Use a record-keeping system that keeps the tags or labels in chronological order, and that allows you to correlate to the date when the shellstock is sold or served.

The shellstock tagging and retention requirement is designed to help regulatory authorities trace shellstock back to its original source. If a foodborne illness outbreak occurs, the tags are required to help regulatory authorities move quickly to close the affected growing areas, or to take other appropriate actions to prevent additional illnesses.



#### 4. Raw oyster / shellfish handling procedures must be followed.

- Product should be refrigerated.
- Product should be stored at least 6" off the floor.
- The shells of previously shucked oysters may not be reused.
- Proper employee handwashing.
- Proper equipment sanitation.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Guide for the Control of Molluscan Shellfish

<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FederalStateFoodPrograms/UCM350004.pdf>

National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP)

<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FederalStateFoodPrograms/UCM415522.pdf>

SafeOyster.org – Gateway

<http://safeoysters.uga.edu/>

For additional information and resources on this topic and other safety and risk management subjects be sure to visit the Loss Control section on our website:

<https://www.amtrustgroup.com/small-business-insurance/claims/prevention>

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