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No Reservations

No Reservations **is a monthly newsletter published by RQA Inc. for the restaurant industry.**

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Food Safety News Article on Oyster Bed Closures

Massachusetts Officials Close Some Oyster Beds After *Vibrio* Outbreak

By News Desk | October 1, 2015

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game's Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) have announced a 14-day closure of oyster beds located in Duxbury Bay, Kingston Bay, Bluefish River, Back River, and Plymouth Harbor.

This closure is due to two additional confirmed illnesses traced to oysters harvested from the area. Officials stated that a total of six cases of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (*Vibrio*) have now been linked to consumption of oysters harvested from these waters within a 30-day period.

That number of illnesses triggers a federally mandated 14-day closure under the U.S. Food and Drug Administration/National Shellfish Sanitation Program's Model Ordinance. A seven-day precautionary closure of the area was announced last week.

Harvesting and possession of oysters from these areas for commercial purposes is prohibited for a total of 14 days in harvest areas CCB-42, CCB-43, CCB-45, CCB-46, and CCB-47, inclusive of the days accrued during the existing seven-day precautionary closure. Commercial oyster beds are scheduled to reopen at sunrise on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2015. If 10 or more confirmed *Vibrio* illnesses are linked to oysters harvested from an area within a 30-day period, the FDA-enforced closure would be extended to 21 days.

Vibrio bacteria thrive in warmer temperatures, multiplying as water and ambient air temperatures increase. The more *Vibrio* present in oysters, the greater the risk of infection. Current water temperatures in Duxbury Bay are consistent with water temperatures and environmental conditions that have been associated with *Vibrio* illnesses, according to state officials.

DPH and DMF have successfully partnered with industry to develop controls to mitigate risk of *Vibrio* associated with Massachusetts-harvested oysters. A statewide Vibrio Control Plan has been in effect since 2013.

The *Vibrio* season in Massachusetts runs from May to October. Health officials are reminding all persons who are at high risk, especially those who are elderly or immune compromised, to avoid eating any raw shellfish.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most people get *Vibrio* infections by eating raw or undercooked shellfish, particularly oysters. Less commonly, this organism can cause an infection in the skin when an open wound is exposed to warm seawater.

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Shellfish Requirements For Restaurants

Shellfish includes mollusks, such as clams, oysters, and mussels. They can be shipped live, frozen, in a shell, or shucked. Interstate shipping is monitored by the state, the FDA, and the shellfish industry. Shellfish must be purchased from suppliers listed in the Interstate Certified Shellfish Shippers List.

Shucked shellfish must be packaged in nonreturnable containers clearly labeled with the name, address, and certification number of the packer. Packages containing less than one-half gallon must have a sell-by date. Packages containing more than one-half gallon should list the date the shellfish were shucked.

Live shellfish must be received on ice or at an air temperature of 45°F or lower, while shucked product must be received at an internal temperature of 45°F or lower. Live shellfish must be delivered alive in nonreturnable containers (please refer to your local health department's food codes). The FDA requires that they carry *shellstock identification tags*. These tags document where the shellfish was harvested. The ID tag should remain attached to the container the shellfish came in until all of the shellfish have been used. Operators are required to keep the shellstock identification tags on file for a minimum of 90 days.

To be acceptable, the shellfish must meet the following criteria:

- Have a mild ocean or seaweed smell
- Closed shells. This indicates they are alive
- If fresh, they must be alive

The shellfish must be rejected based on the criteria below:

- They are slimy, sticky or dry
- They have a strong fishy smell
- The shells are broken
- The shelffish is dead (open and/or cracked shells)

Source: National Restaurant Association, Educational Foundation, ServSafe™

Catering Company, New York State — October 2015

According to the New York Department of Health, an outbreak of food poisoning following a July 31 catered wedding reception was caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*.

Approximately 35 people were sickened after the reception. Nine went to local hospital emergency rooms.
Health department officials told local media that samples from those sickened tested in the laboratory were positive for *S. aureus* enterotoxin infection, a type of food poisoning.

Food items can be contaminated with *S. aureus* bacteria by food service workers who handle food without washing their hands. The toxins produced by staph bacteria are also found in unpasteurized milk and cheese and cannot be destroyed by cooking.
The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that anyone can develop a staph infection, although certain groups of people are at greater risk, including people with chronic conditions such as diabetes, cancer, vascular disease, eczema, and lung disease.

In a healthcare setting, CDC notes that the risk of more serious staph infection is higher because patients often have weakened immune systems or have undergone procedures such as surgery or have intravenous catheters.

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CDC Update for *Salmonella* Multi-State Outbreak — October 2015

Oct. 6 update: CDC announced on Tuesday that 61 more *Salmonella Poona* infections have been reported from 24 states, bringing the total to 732 cases in 35 states (Maryland was added to the list).

One related death has been reported in Oklahoma, bringing the total number of deaths to four, CDC stated. The other reported deaths have been one each in Arizona, California and Texas. Also, CDC reported that 150 people have been hospitalized in connection with this outbreak.

Given the 14-day shelf life of cucumbers and the gap between when someone gets sick and when that illness is reported to public health, it is not unexpected to continue to see illnesses reported after the recalls, the agency noted.

Sept. 29 update: The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) again updated this outbreak on Tuesday, Sept. 29. There are currently three deaths, 131 hospitalizations and 671 confirmed cases being reported in 34 states. The deaths being reported are in Arizona, California and Texas (one each).

Since the previous update a week ago, there have been 113 more *Salmonella* infections reported to CDC from 19 states, and Alabama was added to the list of states reporting cases. “Given the 14-day shelf life of cucumbers, it is not unexpected to continue to see illnesses reported after the recalls,” CDC noted.

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