



Fact Sheet

What You Need To Know Before Harvesting Shellfish This Summer

Bivalve shellfish (also known as bivalve molluscs) are an excellent source of protein. They are also high in essential minerals, and low in calories, fat and cholesterol. Bivalve shellfish have a hinged two-part shell. They include oysters, clams, scallops, mussels and cockles.

Bivalve shellfish are highly sensitive to the quality of their marine environment. They feed on microscopic plants that can sometimes produce marine biotoxins, which can build up in the shellfish tissues. Eating shellfish with high levels of these biotoxins can lead to serious and potentially fatal illness. Bacteria, viruses, metals and contaminants may also build up in the tissues of bivalve shellfish, causing food safety concerns for humans.

Consumers should be aware of the following:

- Caution is required when harvesting bivalve shellfish. It is **your** responsibility to contact your nearest Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) office to find out which areas are assigned as “open” for bivalve shellfish harvesting. An “open” area refers to a safe harvest area that is subject to monitoring and testing, and where harvesting is a legal activity. When an area is officially “closed,” it is **illegal** to harvest bivalve shellfish in that area for any purpose, unless you have a special licence issued by DFO.
- Updates on the opening and closing of harvesting areas are communicated to the public through local media, notices posted in closed areas, and local DFO offices.
- Bivalve shellfish should only be purchased from suppliers you trust and those that have harvested from open areas approved by DFO.
- Bivalve shellfish should be refrigerated or frozen until consumption.
- Bivalve shellfish can have high levels of marine toxins during any given month, depending on environmental conditions. Cooking bivalve shellfish does not always destroy toxins or other contaminants. Properly cooked shellfish can still be toxic.

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- Bivalve shellfish poisoning can also occur in other countries. Tourists should be cautious when eating bivalve shellfish abroad.

Anyone who feels ill after eating bivalve shellfish should seek the advice of a health care professional and contact their local public health unit.

For more information on food-borne illness and safe food handling practices, visit the CFIA's website at www.inspection.gc.ca or call 1-800-442-2342/TTY 1-800-465-7735 (8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. eastern standard time, Monday to Friday).

To [find out which bivalve shellfish harvesting areas are open](#), contact your nearest DFO office or visit their website at www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca.

PO466E-06/08
June, 2008