



Fact Sheet

Home Canning or Bottling Lobster, Clams, Whelks and Other Seafood in Atlantic Canada . . . Is It Safe?

Many Atlantic Canadians can or bottle different types of fish and shellfish in their homes. Home canning or bottling, the practice of preserving food in sealed glass jars, goes back generations. Every year, however, a number of Atlantic Canadians get sick from eating canned or bottled lobster, clams, whelks and other seafood that have been improperly prepared, canned or stored.

Consumers should be aware of the following before eating home-canned or bottled lobster, clams, whelks or other seafood:

- Whether you canned them yourself, bought them (for example, in a farmers market, a road-side stand, a corner store, a community fair, etc.) or received them as a gift, you need to be aware of some potential risks to your health.
- Foods such as lobster, clams, whelks and other seafood are considered low-acid foods under the *Food and Drugs Act* and Regulations, so they must be pressure-canned strictly following the manufacturer's instructions to destroy the bacterium that causes botulism food poisoning, called *Clostridium botulinum* (*C. botulinum*). *C. botulinum* is colourless, odourless, tasteless and invisible to the naked eye. Cooking products contaminated with *C. botulinum* will not guarantee that the toxin has been destroyed.
- Canned or bottled lobster, clams, whelks and other seafood can pose a health risk. These foods can contain the bacteria which, under certain conditions, produces *C. botulinum*, which causes botulism food poisoning. If these foods are prepared, canned or bottled or stored improperly, they could make you very ill.
- Products offered for sale that are prepared according to federal regulations (commercially prepared) are processed under strict controls which minimize or eliminate hazards. Home-canned or bottled lobsters, clams, whelks and other canned seafood may not always be produced under these strict controls. Therefore, your health could be at risk if you eat them.

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- You can greatly reduce the chance of getting sick from eating canned or bottled clams, lobster, whelks or other seafood by avoiding these products if they have not been prepared according to federal regulations (commercially prepared).
- If you are home canning or bottling your own low-acid foods (including clams, lobster and whelks), the following steps will help to reduce the risk of contamination or the presence of *C. botulinum*:
 - Use a pressure canner and strictly follow the manufacturer's instructions for canning or bottling foods considered to be low-acid.
 - Clean and sanitize your hands, all work surfaces, food, utensils, and equipment and keep them clean during all stages of the canning process.
- Never eat canned or bottled foods if you suspect the item has been tampered with, if the closure/seal has been broken or if the container is leaking.

Symptoms of botulism food poisoning can range from nausea, vomiting, fatigue, dizziness, headache, double vision, dryness in the throat and nose to respiratory failure, paralysis and, in some cases, death. The onset of symptoms is generally from 12 to 36 hours after ingesting the toxin. The duration of illness may be 2 hours to 14 days, although some symptoms may linger much longer.

Anyone experiencing symptoms of botulism should seek the advice of a health care professional and should contact their local public health unit.

For more information on food-borne illness, including botulism and safe food handling practices, visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) 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 time, Monday to Friday).

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