

Raw and steamed oysters linked to recent norovirus outbreaks

Steaming may not provide protection against illnesses

Bivalve mollusks such as oysters and clams can concentrate norovirus within the meat, especially if they have been living in water contaminated with human pathogens. Raising the temperature of steamed oysters to 194°F for 1.5 minutes has been shown to be effective in reducing norovirus risks. While holding oysters on ice will increase the quality of the shellfish, the practice does nothing to control norovirus.



Since December 2009 three oyster-linked outbreaks have been reported in the U.S.:

42 Street Oyster Bar, Raleigh, NC:

- **Over 280 ill with norovirus from improperly steamed oysters**

Home and restaurant illnesses, OR, WA and MA:

- **16 cases of norovirus linked to eating raw oysters from Oregon. Recall of oysters distributed to 10 states as a result.**

Seafood conference in MS:

- **11 attendees ill with norovirus. Area where they were harvested has been closed**

334 people in the UK, Norway, France, Sweden and Denmark have also become sick from norovirus-contaminated oysters in multiple outbreaks in the past 3 months.

What you can do

- Ensure that you buy oysters from licensed, reputable suppliers.
- Ask your suppliers about their food safety practices and harvesting sites.
- Tell patrons that steaming is not always an effective cooking step for oysters; steamed is not a safe alternative to raw.
- Lightly steamed oysters (2 minute in steam) may only raise oyster temperature to 70°-80°F and do little more than warm them up.

