

**SUSANA MARTINEZ, GOVERNOR**David Martin, *Cabinet Secretary*Raj Solomon, P.E., *Deputy Secretary***NEWS RELEASE****JULY 14, 2011**

Contact: Jim Winchester
Communications Director
New Mexico Environment Department
(505)231-8800 / jim.winchester@state.nm.us

**Environment Department reminds New Mexicans
to take precautions when eating raw shellfish**

Santa Fe, N.M. - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is advising high-risk individuals not to eat raw oysters, and to only eat oysters that have been thoroughly cooked. Each year millions of Americans enjoy eating raw oysters. However, some people with certain medical conditions are at high risk for becoming seriously ill and dying from eating raw oysters.

Consuming raw or lightly cooked shellfish may pose a serious health risk to individuals, especially if a person has a weakened immune system. Oysters, the most commonly eaten raw shellfish, as well as other types of seafood, may contain bacteria called *Vibrio vulnificus* (Vv) or *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp). Vv and Vp may cause infection after eating raw or lightly cooked shellfish or by exposing skin wounds to warm seawater.

Vv and Vp are naturally occurring organisms that are often found in warm coastal waters such as the Gulf of Mexico. *Vibrio* levels are commonly elevated in these waters during the warmer summer months. Vv and Vp are not a result of polluted water and may be found in approved harvest areas. It is also important to note that Vv and Vp do not change the appearance, taste, or odor of shellfish.

Cooking destroys the bacteria, eliminating the risk of illness for both healthy and immunocompromised individuals. The majority of illnesses that occur from the consumption of raw shellfish are not life-threatening to the general population and commonly range from mild intestinal disorders of short duration to acute gastroenteritis. The symptoms are watery diarrhea, often with abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting, fever and chills. Usually these symptoms occur within 24 hours of ingestion and last no more than three days. Severe disease is rare and occurs most commonly in persons with weakened immune systems. Individual who believe they have experienced the same symptoms of illness after consuming oysters or clams should consult their health care provider and contact their local health department.

Persons with weakened immune systems, including those affected by AIDS; persons who chronically abuse alcohol, liver, stomach or blood disorders, cancer; diabetes or kidney disease should avoid raw oyster consumption altogether, regardless of where the oysters or

clams are harvested. Consumers can continue to enjoy oysters and clams in many cooked preparations by following this advice.

At Restaurants and other Foodservice Establishments:

- Order oysters and clams fully cooked.

In the shell:

- Purchase oysters and clams with the shells closed.
- Throw away any oysters or shells already opened.
- Never allow raw seafood to come into contact with cooked food.
- Boil oysters and clams until the shells open. Once open boil for an additional 3-5 minutes.
- Steamer - add oysters and/or clams to water that is already steaming and cook live oysters and clams until the shells open, once open steam for another 4-9 minutes.
- Use smaller pots to boil or steam oysters and clams. Using larger pots, or cooking too many oysters or clams at one time, may cause uneven heat distribution, which may cause the oysters or clams in the middle to not get fully cooked.
- Discard any oysters or clams that do not open during cooking.

Shucked Oysters and Clams:

- Never allow raw seafood to come into contact with cooked food.
- Boil or simmer shucked oysters and clams for at least 3 minutes or until the edges curl.
- Fry at 375 degrees for at least 3 minutes.
- Broil 3 inches from heat for 3 minutes.
- Bake at 450 degrees for 10 minutes.

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