

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR HANDLING & CONSUMING OYSTERS FROM THE GARDEN

We can't control Mother Nature, but we can practice some simple measures to reduce risk of illness from handling and consuming shellfish from the garden:

HANDLING GUIDANCE & WOUNDS:

There are naturally occurring bacteria in the water (not associated with pollution) that can cause serious infections through wounds. Stay out of the water if you have an open wound. If you cut yourself while on the water, wash the area immediately and apply antibiotic ointment. Watch for warning signs of infection and seek medical attention as needed.

- VDH Factsheet - [Vibrio and water safety in Virginia](#) & [Website](#)

CONSUMPTION GUIDANCE:

- Know the growing area classification of your oyster garden location and do NOT eat oysters from closed / condemned growing areas. Not only is harvesting oysters from condemned waters a violation of your permit, but it is also a risk to your health. *Think you'll cook out the contamination? Think again - bacteria and viruses survive long cooking temperatures.*
 - [Safe Harvest - Growing Area Classification Handout](#)
 - [CDC information on Vibriosis](#) - who's at risk, vibrio & raw oysters, cooking shellfish
 - [CDC Norovirus Handout](#) & [CDC Norovirus Webpage](#)
 - [Marine Advisory Program Oyster Gardening](#) webpage
- Do not eat raw/undercooked oysters if you have an illness or medication that reduces your immune response as this puts you at high risk for serious illness or death from a specific bacterial species infection (*Vibrio vulnificus*). Examples include, but are not limited to: liver disease, diabetes, cancer, stomach disorders.
 - [CDC information on Vibriosis](#) - who's at risk
- Keep oysters on ice or under refrigeration from the time they are pulled out of the water until you shuck and eat them. This is especially important in the warm months when natural bacteria levels in water are higher. It's the same reason you don't leave milk on the counter - bacteria multiply faster in warm temps.
- Don't eat oysters harvested after a rain event as run off from land temporarily introduces pollution; likely fecal pollution from pets or wildlife. Wait a few days for oysters to purge the contamination. For major rain events like hurricanes - wait 7-10 days.
- Discard cracked or gaping oysters - these are dead or dying.

Keep us COLD - keep oysters on ice/refrigerated until you eat them

Let us DRAIN - keep oysters out of melted ice water

Let us BREATHE - don't seal in an airtight container