

Raw Oyster Public Health Warning in BC

*An outbreak of diarrheal illness caused by Vibrio bacteria is occurring in British Columbia at this time. **Please be aware that you are at an increased risk of getting this infection from eating raw oysters harvested in BC. To reduce your risk, choose cooked oysters.***

The First Nations Health Authority is reminding First Nations harvesters not to harvest and consume **RAW** oysters for risk of illness caused by the Vibrio parahaemolyticus bacteria. An outbreak of diarrheal illness among the general population is currently being caused by elevated levels of Vibrio parahaemolyticus detected in higher than normal concentrations in BC.

When ingested, Vibrio parahaemolyticus causes watery diarrhea usually with abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting, fever and chills. Usually these symptoms occur within 24 hours of ingestion and last 2-3 days. Severe disease is rare and occurs more commonly in persons with weakened immune systems. Antibiotic treatment is not necessary in most cases of Vibrio parahaemolyticus infection. Patients should drink plenty of liquids to replace fluids lost through diarrhea.

Vibrio parahaemolyticus is a naturally occurring bacteria present in saltwater and is most often associated with eating raw or inadequately cooked seafood, however it is primarily associated with the consumption of raw oysters. The FNHA is reminding First Nations that **RAW** oysters are a high-risk food, and the only effective way to lower the risk of becoming sick is to properly cook the oysters before consuming. The hot summer this year has likely contributed to the increase in Vibrio parahaemolyticus levels.

Please be safe and remember the following:

- Cook shellfish thoroughly before eating, especially oysters. Do not eat raw shellfish.
- Cook food to a safe internal temperature
- Eat shellfish right away after cooking and refrigerate leftovers.
- Always keep raw and cooked shellfish separate.
- Store the oysters at 4°C or colder until just prior to preparing them.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Environment Canada is continuing to monitor levels of Vibrio parahaemolyticus along the BC coast. Shellfish from an approved commercial supplier are considered safe for consumption in moderate amounts.

For additional information on handling shellfish safely, connect with your FNHA Environmental Health Officer. Find their contact information here: www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/environmental-health

[Read more on Marine Toxins through HealthLinkBC here.](#)