

Handling Shellfish

Keep shellfish cool after harvesting. If the temperature of shellfish is allowed to rise, bacteria will grow and the shellfish will become unsafe to eat.

Storing Shellfish

- **Fresh shellfish in the shell.** All fresh shellfish should be stored in an open container in the refrigerator. Place a damp towel on top to maintain humidity. Never store shellfish in water. They will die and may spoil. Shellfish that are open and don't close when tapped are dead. Throw them out. **Storage times for shellfish vary:**
 - **Shellfish that close their shells completely** can be stored for up to seven days. This includes oysters, littlenecks, butter clams, and cockles. Exception: **Mussels** can be stored for three to four days.
 - **Shellfish that cannot completely close their shells** can be stored for three to four days. This includes horse clams, softshell clams, geoducks, and razor clams.
- **Shucked Shellfish.** Shellfish removed from their shells should keep in a refrigerator for up to three days. In a freezer, they should keep for up to three months.
- **Cooked Shellfish.** Cooked shellfish should keep in the refrigerator for up to two days and in a freezer up to three months.
- **Thawed Shellfish.** Shellfish taken from the freezer and thawed in a refrigerator should keep for up to two days. Once thawed, do not refreeze.

Cooking Shellfish

To ensure proper food safety, shellfish must be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 145°F. Since it is often impractical to use a food thermometer to check the temperature of cooked shellfish, here are some tips and recommended ways to cook shellfish safely:

- **Shucked shellfish** (clams, mussels and oysters without shells) become plump and opaque when cooked thoroughly and the edges of the oysters start to curl. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) suggests boiling shucked oysters for 3 minutes, frying them in oil at 375° F for 10 minutes, or baking them at 450° F for 10 minutes.
- **Clams, mussels and oysters** in the shell will open when cooked. The FDA suggests steaming oysters for 4 to 9 minutes or boiling them for 3 to 5 minutes after they open.
- **Scallops** turn milky white or opaque and firm. Depending on size, scallops take 3 to 4 minutes to cook thoroughly.
- **Boiled lobster** turns bright red. Allow 5 to 6 minutes; start timing the lobster when the water comes back to a full boil.
- **Shrimp** turn pink and firm. Depending on the size, it takes from 3 to 5 minutes to boil or steam 1 pound of medium size shrimp in the shell.

more information on the back

Vibrio parahaemolyticus

When temperatures rise in the summertime, so do bacteria levels in shellfish, most notably [Vibrio parahaemolyticus](#) (Vp). The commercial shellfish industry is aware of this and follows strict refrigeration and handling requirements during warm summer months. Recreational harvesters also need to be aware of this risk when planning a summer trip to the shore. Here are a few tips you need to know:

- **Always check the pollution and the biotoxin status of the beach** you want to harvest at the DOH website www.doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety.htm. If you don't have access to a computer, you can call 1-800-562-5632 for biotoxin closures or your local health department for pollution closures.
- **Harvest as soon as possible after the tide goes out** (at the beginning of the tide cycle instead of at the end).
- **Do not harvest oysters that have been exposed to direct sunlight** for more than two hours.
- **Place oysters under refrigeration or on ice immediately** after harvest.
- **Thoroughly cook your oysters: the internal temperature must reach 145°F for 15 seconds.** Unlike PSP and Domoic Acid toxins, thorough cooking **does** destroy Vp, but barbequing oysters just until they open will not kill the bacteria. Follow the "Cooking Shellfish" guidelines on the other side of this sheet to make sure you are cooking them long enough.

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