



Industry Notice

July 15 2011

TO: REGISTERED SHELLFISH PROCESSING ESTABLISHMENTS IN ATLANTIC CANADA

SUBJECT: *VIBRIO PARAHAEMOLYTICUS* IN BIVALVE SHELLFISH

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is providing the following update and reminder regarding the management of risks associated with the consumption of shellfish contaminated with *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*.

Vibrio parahaemolyticus (Vp) is a bacterium that naturally inhabits coastal waters of Canada and of the United States, and will be present in higher concentrations during summer as water temperatures rise. It lives in brackish saltwater and can cause gastrointestinal illness in humans. It is important to note that Vp can be present in any marine area regardless of the classification established by the Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program (CSSP).

In the summer of 2010 there were 4 confirmed Vp illnesses which were linked to the consumption of shellfish that originated from eastern Canada. Three of the cases were linked to the consumption of raw oysters and the other case was linked to consumption of raw quahaugs. Prior to these illnesses, there had only been one confirmed case of Vp in Atlantic Canada over the last 10 years. An exceptionally warm summer in 2010 may have been a contributing factor for this increase in the number of illnesses.

Operators of registered shellfish processing establishments have a responsibility to control all food safety hazards through the implementation of their Quality Management Program (QMP) Plans, and should now consider Vp as a hazard as part of their HACCP Plan. Vp may be controlled through the implementation of effective time-temperature controls from harvest through processing and distribution. Processors should pay extra attention to these controls between mid June and mid September when higher ambient temperatures are experienced. Some of the factors that should be considered when reviewing the establishment's QMP Plan to ensure that Vp is being controlled include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring that suppliers, such as harvesters and aquaculturists, handle shellfish to comply with Schedule III and V of the *Fish Inspection Regulations*, and cool them properly to prevent exposure to elevated temperatures during harvesting and transport.

- Having procedures to verify that shellfish were protected from time/temperature abuse prior to delivery at the establishment with a description of the corrective actions that will be taken if the shellfish were improperly handled, stored or transported prior to arrival at the establishment; and
- Reviewing the QMP Plan to ensure that time/temperature controls applied when shellfish are handled, stored or processed at the establishment are being followed and that they are effective to prevent growth of bacteria.

The CFIA will be conducting routine compliance verification activity and will be assessing your QMP Plans to ensure that they have appropriate controls to comply with the requirements set out by the CSSP and the *Fish Inspection Regulations*.

In addition to these processing controls, the CFIA will be conducting a survey of several areas in Atlantic Canada during 2011 to collect further information on the presence and levels of Vp in shellfish. The CFIA will follow up with registered establishments regarding the outcome of the survey and to discuss whether additional controls are required to address Vp risks.

Any questions or comments regarding the above can be directed to your local CFIA Fish Inspection office.

Sincerely,

Terence McRae
Director
Fish, Seafood and Production Division
Agrifood, Meat and Seafood Safety Directorate
Canadian Food Inspection Agency

The logo for the Government of Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a stylized red maple leaf to the right of the letter 'a'.