

# COMMUNICATION

Food &amp; Controlled Drugs Branch &amp; PIRSA

To: Food businesses

Title: *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* in bivalve molluscs

## Purpose

The purpose of this communication is to advise food businesses of the safe food handling practices for bivalve molluscs (e.g. oysters, cockles, mussels, scallops) to reduce the risk of bacteria growth (e.g. *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*) during transport and storage. Traceability is an additional control that is important to help identify the source of foodborne illnesses linked to contaminated bivalve molluscs.

## Background

*Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp) infection can be acquired by consuming raw or undercooked bivalve molluscs. Eating raw oysters is the most common route of infection as the bacteria is naturally found in warm tidal waters where oysters grow and as they are eaten raw and not fully cooked before consumption. Vp does not typically spread from person to person, although it can spread through poor personal hygiene. The health risks related to consuming raw or undercooked bivalve molluscs are increased when poor handling and storage practices occur after harvest. Post-harvest temperature control is the most critical point to manage Vp numbers as it won't grow in bivalve molluscs stored at 10°C or lower.

## Controlling the risks

### Storage and handling

- Only purchase bivalve molluscs from [approved suppliers](#) and reject any unopened bivalve molluscs that are not under temperature control when received (at 10°C or below)
- Any dead, damaged or diseased bivalve molluscs must be discarded and should not be sold
- Store unopened bivalve molluscs at 10°C or below
- Running, potable water must be used when opening bivalve molluscs (e.g. shucking oysters) to prevent cross contamination and do not submerge or dip the opened bivalve molluscs in still water
- Opened bivalve molluscs (e.g. shucked oysters) must be stored at 5°C or below



## Traceability

It is very important to maintain traceability from the farm to the customer including transportation and at retail. This enables a food business or government agency to quickly identify and isolate contaminated products and stop them from reaching consumers.

Isolating the affected product will minimise trade disruption and any potential public health risks. All food businesses should record and maintain the following information:

- The name and address of the seafood business authorised by the licence
- A unique identifier of the batch of bivalve molluscs
- The name of the harvesting area
- The date of harvest
- The species and quantity of bivalve molluscs
- A statement indicating the storage conditions

Wholesale businesses must maintain sufficient written records to identify the immediate supplier and immediate recipient of bivalve molluscs for the purposes of ensuring the safety of the seafood.

The key to controlling vibrio is to maintain temperature control during transport, storage or processing to prevent the Vp load increasing and hence, reducing the risk of foodborne illness.

## Further information

Bivalve mollusc processors, wholesalers and importers may be required to implement additional controls.

Please refer to the SA Health website:

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/public+health/food+safety+for+businesses/food+industry+sector/bivalve+mollusc+and+seafood+businesses/bivalve+mollusc+and+seafood+businesses+food+safety+requirements>

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## For more information

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Tel (08) 8207 7900  
[https://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/food\\_safety/shellfish\\_sasgap](https://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/food_safety/shellfish_sasgap)

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