Oysters for Raw Consumption and Food Safety

Trade Consultation Forum
6th January 2017
Oysters

- Oysters feed by filtering large volumes of water from their surrounding environment.
- If they are grown and harvested from water containing **pathogens, chemical contaminants** or **natural toxins**, these substances may accumulate in the oysters and pose significant health risks to consumers.
### Potential Hazards Associated with Oysters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Hazards</th>
<th>Example(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pathogens</td>
<td>- Viruses (e.g. norovirus and Hepatitis A &amp; E viruses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Bacteria (e.g. <em>Vibrio parahaemolyticus</em>, <em>Vibrio cholerae</em> (O1 and O139) and <em>Vibrio vulnificus</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Contaminants</td>
<td>- Heavy metals (e.g. cadmium and lead)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Toxins</td>
<td>- Marine biotoxins (e.g. Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) toxins)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Food Poisoning Cases Linked to Consumption of Raw Oysters in Our Locality (2014-2016*)

Centre for Health Protection of Department of Health

- 18 confirmed norovirus food poisoning cases
- 2 confirmed *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* food poisoning cases
- Affecting a total of 82 people

*Data for 2016 (up to 13 September 2016)
## Classification of Production Areas of Live Bivalve Molluscs in EU

**Regulation (EC) No 854/2004***

Areas are classified into three classes according to the level of faecal contamination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class A</strong></td>
<td>Areas from which live bivalve molluscs may be collected for direct human consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class B</strong></td>
<td>Areas from which live bivalve molluscs may be collected, but placed on the market for human consumption only after treatment in a purification centre or after relaying so as to meet the health standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class C</strong></td>
<td>Areas from which live bivalve molluscs may be collected but placed on the market only after relaying over a long period so as to meet the health standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Example of Rapid Alert to Trade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Date: 2 March 2016</th>
<th>Case No. 案號: 2 March 2016-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Pages (including this copy) 總頁數（連本頁）: 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**RAPID ALERT**

**快速警示**

Import and sale of raw oysters harvested from Growing Area “Penn Cove” at Washington State, the United States (US) prohibited immediately.

食安中心已禁止美國華盛頓州Penn Cove養殖區出產的生蠔進口及在香港出售。

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**Source of Information:**

Centre for Food Safety (CFS)

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**Name of Affected Product:**

Raw Oysters

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**Duty of Indications/ List Code:**

N/A

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**Barcode/GTIN/CEAN:**

N/A

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**Name and Address of Manufacturer/Distributor:**

CFS announced on March 2 that the import into and sale within Hong Kong of raw oysters harvested in Growing Area “Penn Cove” at Washington State, US has been prohibited with immediate effect. The CFS was notified by the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health of a food poisoning case which involved consumption of raw oysters at a restaurant in Causeway Bay. The stool sample of one of the affected persons tested positive for norovirus upon laboratory testing. The CFS has conducted follow-up investigation at the restaurant concerned and its food supplier. Investigations showed that no remaining stock of the affected batch of raw oysters was found on both premises. According to the information provided by the food supplier concerned, the affected raw oysters were harvested in Penn Cove, Washington State, US. For the sake of prudence, the CFS has immediately banned the import into and sale within Hong Kong of all raw oysters harvested from the area.

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**Advice to Trade:**

1. Avoid selling or serving the products concerned. Do not sell or use these products.
2. Contact Centre for Food Safety immediately at 2116 8254 (office hours) or 9867 8401 (off-office hours) if the product(s) concern is/are available. Sale of food unfit for human consumption in Hong Kong is an offence. If the above food is detected, please contact the Centre at 2116 8254 (office hours) or 9867 8401 (off-office hours) or 9867 8341 immediately. Such sale is an offence.
3. Please take necessary actions to ensure all products for sale are fit for human consumption and complying with relevant standards. We recommend that all types of food be thoroughly cooked and yield in order to prevent possible exposure. Purchase or consume the products only if they are clearly marked as fit for human consumption.
4. Check relevant website(s) for latest information. We recommend that all types of food be thoroughly cooked and yield in order to prevent possible exposure. Purchase or consume the products only if they are clearly marked as fit for human consumption.
5. Contact Centre for Food Safety via the above telephone no., if there are any enquiries. We recommend that all types of food be thoroughly cooked and yield in order to prevent possible exposure. Purchase or consume the products only if they are clearly marked as fit for human consumption.

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**Further Information:**

Related press releases could be accessed at the following webpage of the CFS:

- [http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201603/02/P2016030206876.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201603/02/P2016030206876.htm)
- [http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201603/02/P2016030206873.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201603/02/P2016030206873.htm)
Advice to Trade

- Selling oyster to be eaten in raw state requires permission in writing/endorsement from the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene.

- Source oysters that are grown in and harvested from areas of clean water.

- Transaction records should be kept to ensure traceability as required by the Food Safety Ordinance (Cap 612).

- Obtain oysters from reliable sources with health certificates issued by the relevant authority of the exporting country.
Je soussigné, vétérinaire officiel, certifie que / The undersigned, official inspector, hereby certifies that:

- Les produits de la pêche décrits ci-dessus proviennent d'établissements agréés par l'autorité compétente ; / The above aquatic products come from the establishment approved by the competent authority;
- Les produits ont été manipulés, préparés ou produits, conditionnés, entreposés et transportés dans des conditions sanitaires appropriées, sous la supervision de l'autorité compétente, dans le respect des dispositions du code d'usage pour les poissons et les produits de la pêche du Codex alimentarius /The aquatic products described above have been handled, prepared or produced, packed, stored and transported under sanitary conditions and under supervision by the competent authority, in accordance with the requirements laid down in Codex alimentarius Code of Practice for fish and fishery products;
- Les produits ont été inspectés par l'autorité compétente, conformément aux réglementations européennes et hong kongaises applicables, et aucun germe pathogène, substance toxique ou substance indésirable n'ont été mis en évidence /The aquatic products were inspected and quarantined by the competent authority, in accordance with the relevant European and Hong Kong regulations, and no pathogenic bacteria, harmful or foreign substances were found;
- Les produits sont conformes aux règles sanitaires et vétérinaires et sont propres à la consommation humaine /The aquatic products meet veterinary and sanitary requirements and are fit for human consumption.
The products do not contain harmful levels of heavy metals in accordance with international standards.
Live bivalve molluscan shellfish do not contain harmful levels of marine biotoxins in accordance with international standards.
The products do not contain harmful levels of bacteria in accordance with international standards.
All used certificates must be kept on file in the company's records for three years. Any certificate(s) not used must be marked "Void - did not ship" and kept on file in the export company's records for three years.
Advice to Public (1)

- Eating raw oysters carries inherent food safety risks.
- Susceptible populations (e.g. the elderly, young children, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems) should avoid eating raw oysters.
- Maintain a balanced diet and avoid overindulgence in oysters for minimising the excessive exposure of chemical contaminants or natural toxins from a small range of food items.
Advice to Public (2)

For oysters intended for consumption after cooking, never eat them raw. Make sure the oysters are cooked properly before consumption.

Eating raw oysters with hot sauce, lemon juice, vinegar or alcohol does not kill pathogens – only thorough cooking can destroy them.

To reduce risk, raw oysters should only be consumed in or obtained from reliable licensed premises.

Check with the shop whether the oysters are accompanied by health certificates issued by competent authorities from their places of origin.
END

Thank you