



Seafood Safety Tips



SEAFOOD SAFETY TIPS

Seafood is no exception when it comes to the importance of proper handling and preparation to minimize the risk of foodborne illness. Follow these tips on how to select seafood and how to keep it safe after purchase.

PURCHASING

Know your seafood retailer. Buy from licensed stores and markets. If in doubt, ask the seafood market personnel to show you the certified shipper's tag that accompanies "shell-on" products or check the certification number on shucked oyster containers. Shell stock products must be alive when purchased. Do not accept dead oysters, mussels or clams unless they are cooked or the meat is shucked and chilled.

If you catch your own seafood, make sure the waters are approved for harvest. Check with your local health department or call the Texas Department of Health at 512-458-7277 for round the clock information.

STORAGE

Keep fresh, pasteurized or smoked seafood products refrigerated at 32° - 38° F. Freeze raw seafood that will not be used in one or two days. If it will be eaten raw, hard freeze it for seven days before consuming to reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Keep your freezer at 0° F.

Store live lobsters, crabs, clams, oysters and

mussels (shellfish) in a refrigerator, but not in airtight plastic bags or containers. Cover them with damp paper towels. Do not cook or eat shellfish if they have died during storage.

HANDLING AND PREPARATION

Thaw frozen seafood in the refrigerator or in ice cold water. Do not thaw at room temperature. Bacteria multiply fast at room temperature. Thawed seafood may be refrozen: There will be some quality loss, but it will not make you ill.

When preparing seafood, do not cross contaminate! Handle raw and cooked foods separately. Wash hands and utensils after touching raw seafoods. Sanitize cutting boards after use with a solution of 1 1/2 to 2 teaspoons bleach per quart of water.



Fish is cooked when it turns opaque in color and reaches an internal temperature of 145o F. Follow package directions when cooking or heating processed frozen foods.

Just as the consumption of rare meat, raw eggs and raw milk carries a risk of foodborne illness, so does eating raw fish (sashimi, sushi and ceviche) and raw oysters, clams and mussels. Parasites too small to see may be present in raw seafood. They are completely destroyed by cooking, freezing for at least 72 hours or hot smoking. They may survive other procedures such as brining, pickling, cold smoking and marinating.

In addition to parasites, a common saltwater microorganism, *Vibrio vulnificus*, is carried at times by oysters, particularly in summer months in Gulf Coast waters. It can be the cause of severe illness and death for individuals with certain medical conditions. People with chronic liver disease or compromised immune systems should avoid consuming raw or partially cooked oysters.

To avoid all risk from parasites and microorganisms, enjoy fish and shellfish in their many delicious, cooked preparations.

The information in this leaflet was provided by Annette Reddell Hegen, Seafood Consumer Education Specialist, Texas Marine Advisory Service.

Seafood is the Cause of Human Illness Only When

- it comes from contaminated waters and you eat it raw.
- you eat it raw after it has spoiled. It may spoil because of improper handling either by the fisherman, the dealer, the restaurant or you at home or it may spoil after damage to the package that allows bacteria to enter.
- it contains toxins produced by or found naturally in that species of fish.
- you are allergic to the seafood and you inhale fumes from that species of seafood, either raw or cooked. Food allergy is often mistaken for food poisoning.
- it contains certain parasites that have not been destroyed because it is served raw or lightly cured.



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