

Education

Are there plans in place for helping to educate oyster harvesters?

Yes, the Division of Marine Fisheries has been working with other states impacted by Vp to develop educational materials for professional oyster harvesters in MA. DMF has already been presenting to industry professionals on the Vibrio Control Management Plan.

Are there plans to educate the public concerning recreationally harvested oysters?

Although recreational harvesters are not subject to the requirements of the Vibrio Control Management Plan, MDPH recommends that recreational harvesters consume or refrigerate their oysters within the 5-hour limit set forth in the plan. Further educational materials will be developed by MDPH and posted on its website.

What is the message to the public regarding the plan?

Implementation of the Vibrio Control Management Plan, along with existing food safety regulations, provide assurance to the public that consumption of commercially available raw oysters does not present a health hazard.

Resources

Where can I get more information about Vp control measures on eastern Cape Cod Bay?

For more information, contact:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Food Protection Program
(617) 983-6700
www.mass.gov/dph/fpp

Michael Hickey or Thomas Shields
Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game
Division of Marine Fisheries
(508)-990-2860
www.mass.gov/marinefisheries



Vibrio Control and Management in Eastern Cape Cod Bay

Information for Professional Oyster Harvesters



BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
FOOD PROTECTION PROGRAM
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Background

In spring 2012, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) directed Massachusetts public health and marine fisheries officials to implement an Enhanced Vibrio Control Management Plan for eastern Cape Cod Bay. This directive was in response to two cases of foodborne illness caused by *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp) in individuals who reported consuming oysters from food establishments on Cape Cod. Vp is a naturally occurring bacteria found in seawater in bays and estuaries; however people can get sick if they eat raw oysters which have been contaminated by Vp.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the plan being put into place for eastern Cape Cod Bay and not other regions of the state?

The FDA has determined that eastern Cape Cod Bay is currently the only region in Massachusetts in which Vp is reasonably likely to occur. This determination is based on a variety of physical factors in that area, including: a long tidal shelf, more extensive exposed areas at low tide, oyster culture and harvest techniques used in the area, as well as reports of human illness associated with oysters specifically from eastern Cape Cod Bay.

Do the levels of Vp in oysters change with the cycles of the tide? How are the levels of Vp in oysters affected?

Levels of Vp in oysters can vary with the tidal cycles. Vp levels can increase in the animals when exposed during low tide, but oysters are constantly purging themselves when under water during high tide. Vp levels in oysters can rise dramatically with increasing air and water temperature.

Which specific oyster harvesting areas will be required to implement the plan?

Oyster harvesting areas that are located in the waters and flats along Cape Cod Bay in the towns of Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro and Provincetown will be required to implement the plan.



Will the plan be required year-round or seasonally?

The measures outlined in the plan are only required from June 17th through September 8th inclusive each year.

What does the plan require?

Oyster harvesters must include time of harvest as well as date of harvest on the tag of each bag or container of oysters, and must ensure that those oysters are iced within 5 hours of time of harvest. During transport to the receiving dealer, harvesters must ensure that oysters are adequately shaded so they're not exposed to direct sunlight.

Receiving dealers must cool the oysters to a measured 50 degrees Fahrenheit in a refrigeration unit within 10 hours from the time the harvester placed the oysters on ice.

How is time of harvest determined?

Time of Harvest means the time when the first shellstock in a lot is taken from the water, or in the case of intertidal harvest, the time of first exposure.

What will happen to oysters which have not been brought down to 50 degrees Fahrenheit within the required 15 hours?

Oysters will be prevented from being shipped for human consumption and will be returned to the lease site, if possible, or destroyed.



Can harvesters refrigerate at their own home overnight with their own refrigeration unit?

No. After 5 hours, the only allowable storage is in a refrigerator owned and maintained by a wholesale dealer subject to control measures required by state food safety regulations.

Can harvesters pre-bag product and then leave that product in the grant site for harvest the following day?

Yes. Oysters may be pre-bagged (i.e. put in a net bag and left underwater at the site) and harvested (removed from grant site) and refrigerated the following day. The day they are removed from the grant site is considered to be the day of harvest.

Can wet (submerged) storage be used as an interim measure to extend the time between harvest and required time of refrigeration?

This method is not considered feasible for the 2012 oyster harvesting season. State public health and marine officials will work with harvesters on this and other possible alternative methods for the 2013 season.



How will state and local officials enforce the plan?

Oyster tagging and harvesting procedures in the affected area will be monitored by local shellfish constables and the state Environmental Police. Inspectors from the MDPH Food Protection Program (FPP) will follow up on record keeping and other control measures during routine inspections of wholesale dealer facilities. FPP staff will coordinate with Division of Marine Fisheries and environmental law enforcement as needed. Initial enforcement efforts will focus on significant education and outreach to the oyster farming community.

How will the state monitor the situation to determine if there is a continuing Vp problem?

State health officials will continue monitoring for human cases of Vp illness as part of their overall foodborne illness surveillance efforts.

What other states already have Vibrio Control Management Plans in place?

While every state that harvests shellfish has unique growing conditions, other states that have Vibrio Control Management Plans include New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, and Washington.

