



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, Mississippi 39530

News Release

Contact: Shelly Becker

Phone: (228) 523-4051

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PUBLIC SERVICE NOTICE:

MDMR Advises Consumers to Cook Oysters Harvested Between Feb. 25 and March 17, 2009 from Growing Area 2C in Mississippi due to Possible Contamination with Norovirus

BILOXI, Miss. – The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) has been advised by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Tennessee Department of Health of an epidemiological association between oysters harvested from Conditionally Approved Area 2-C Shellfish Growing Waters in Mississippi on February 24, 2009, and incidences of Norovirus infection from patrons at one Tennessee restaurant.

Conditionally Approved Area 2-C Shellfish Growing Waters were closed to the harvest of oysters at 4:00 p.m. March 17, 2009 in compliance with the shellfish growing waters management plan for those waters. The area will remain closed to the harvest of oysters until it is determined by the MDMR, that the oysters in those waters are safe for harvest.

However, because Norovirus can persist in the environment for extended periods of time and out of an abundance of caution consumers are advised that oysters harvested from Area 2-C between February 25 and March 17, 2009 should not be consumed without thorough cooking. Shippers and processors should take measures to advise their clients and customers of the potential risks of handling and consuming oysters harvested from Area 2-C during the identified dates. Additionally, pursuant to the guidelines of the National Shellfish Sanitation Program, the MDMR is advising shippers and processors that have handled oysters harvested from Growing Area 2-C on February 24, 2009, to initiate a voluntary recall of the suspected oysters. The recall is only a precaution. On February 24, 2009 4,728 sacks of oysters were harvested from Conditionally Approved Area 2-C Shellfish Growing Waters in Mississippi. Only one restaurant in Tennessee has implicated Mississippi oysters with incidences of Norovirus. Out of an abundance of caution, the MDMR is requesting a voluntary recall.

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Symptoms of Norovirus infection include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramping. Affected individuals often experience low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. Most people show symptoms within 48 hours of exposure to the virus, with the illness lasting one to two days. However, the illness can become serious for the very young, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

Considering the shelf-life of the product, it is possible that suspect oysters from the designated area are still available in other retail and food service settings, including frozen products.

Persons with weakened immune systems, including those affected by AIDS, and persons with chronic alcohol abuse, liver, stomach or blood disorders, cancer, diabetes or kidney disease should avoid raw oyster consumption altogether, regardless of where the oysters are harvested.

Cooking destroys the virus, eliminating the risk of illness for both healthy and immunocompromised individuals. MDMR advises that it's always best to cook seafood thoroughly to minimize the risk of food borne illness. Consumers can continue to enjoy oysters in many cooked preparations by following this advice:

At Restaurants and other Foodservice Establishments:

- Order oysters fully cooked.

In the Shell:

- Purchase oysters with the shells closed. Throw away any oysters with shells already opened.

To prepare oysters for eating, choose one of the following methods:

- Boil oysters until the shells open. Once open, boil for an additional 3-5 minutes.
- Steamer - add oysters to water that is already steaming and cook live oysters until the shells open; once open steam for another 4-9 minutes.
- Use smaller pots to boil or steam oysters. Using larger pots, or cooking too many oysters at one time, may cause uneven heat distribution, which may cause the oysters in the middle to not get fully cooked.
- Discard any oysters that do not open during cooking.

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Shucked Oysters:

To prepare oysters for eating, choose one of the following methods:

- Boil or simmer shucked oysters for at least 3 minutes or until the edges curl.
- Fry at 375 degrees for at least 3 minutes.
- Broil 3 inches from heat for 3 minutes.
- Bake at 450 degrees for 10 minutes.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources is dedicated to enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the State by managing all marine life, public trust wetlands, adjacent uplands and waterfront areas to provide for the optimal commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources consistent with environmental concerns and social changes. Visit the DMR online at www.dmr.ms.gov.

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