

**National Shellfish Sanitation Program
Guide for the Control of Molluscan Shellfish
2005**

NSSP Policy Setting Documents

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Public Health Service
Food and Drug Administration
Washington DC 20204**

**POLICY STATEMENT
CONSUMPTION OF RAW MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH**

Molluscan shellfish are animal-derived protein foods that are widely consumed and play an important role in the diets of some consumers. Most animal-derived protein foods are cooked prior to consumption. Cooking can reduce a number of potentially pathogenic organisms and the risk of illness. However, molluscan shellfish are often consumer raw or partially cooked. Therefore, some cases of illness are inevitable from consuming them in this way.

The majority of illnesses that occur from the consumption of raw molluscan shellfish are the result of pollution. They are not life threatening to the general population and commonly range from mild intestinal disorders of short duration to acute gastroenteritis. More serious illnesses can occur, but are rare.

Certain medically compromised individuals are at increased risk from common marine *Vibrio sp.* bacteria that are unrelated to pollution. Therefore, it may not be possible to address this risk through environmental controls. Although the reported number of illnesses and fatalities from these bacteria in the United States each year is small in comparison with other food borne illnesses, the best advice for medically compromised individuals is not to eat raw molluscan shellfish. At most risk are those affected by: AIDS; chronic alcohol abuse; liver, stomach or blood disorders; cancer; diabetes; and kidney disease. Those uncertain of their health should seek the advice of their physician.

To reduce the risk of illnesses associated with raw shellfish consumption, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) administers the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP). The NSSP is a tripartite cooperative program of Federal and State public health officials and the shellfish industry working together to improve shellfish safety. FDA is committed to the NSSP partnership as providing the best means of making molluscan shellfish as safe as possible. States annually spend millions of dollars to monitor waters to assure that they are safe before harvesting is permitted. FDA routinely audits the States' classification of shellfish harvesting areas to verify that none pose a threat to public health. FDA has also increased its cooperative efforts with State and Federal law enforcement officers to prevent illegal harvesting from closed waters, a practice that probably leads to most shellfish illnesses. Adhering to NSSP controls will help to keep risks to a minimum.