

Handling of Live Oysters at Retail

Handling and serving live oysters in your shop or restaurant is different to other ready to eat foods. You need to look after a live animal and ensure that it remains alive until it is either eaten or cooked. Where oysters are eaten raw the main health controls will have occurred at the place of depuration and dispatch. In the event of an incident or recall it is essential to be able to trace oysters back to the dispatch centre they came from. Records kept there will be able to trace the oysters further back to the actual harvesting bed they came from. This will allow individual beds to be closed if necessary to protect the health of consumers.



These notes will help you to maintain traceability and maintain your oysters in the best condition so that the health and satisfaction of your customers is safeguarded.

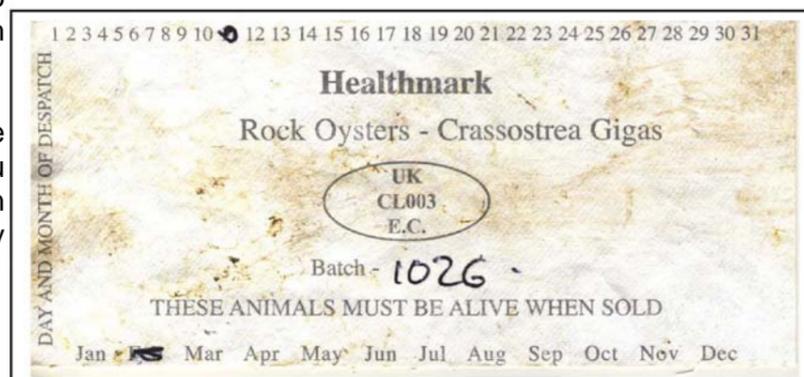
Traceability

All packages of live oysters must be accompanied by a health mark on an indelible, water resistant label like the one shown below. This shows the identification number of the establishment from which they have come (in the ellipse) and a batch number. These two details should be sufficient to identify the actual bed from which the oysters were harvested. By law the retailer or caterer must keep the health mark for at least 60 days in case this information is needed. The easiest way to do this is to staple the label into a large diary at the day of delivery. [Do this in a non-food area to avoid contaminating food with staples.]

If any of your customers inform you that they have been ill as a result of eating oysters at your premises, contact your local Environmental Health Officer at once and give him or her the details from the relevant label.

Try to avoid using oysters from different suppliers at the same time but, if this is unavoidable, devise your own method of being able to identify who ate oysters from which supplier.

The health mark also states "These animals must be alive when sold". You have to make sure they are alive when sold or cooked. If they are not tightly closed or do not rapidly close tightly when tapped – they are dead and should not be used.



Reception and Handling of Oysters

Reception

- Check the health mark. If there is no health mark reject the consignment.
- Check that the vehicle is clean and that the oysters have not been mixed with raw fish or kept in hot and dirty conditions.

Storage

- Always keep the oysters stored with the curved (convex) side downwards. This helps to retain the fluid in the shell and keep them alive.
- Store the oysters in a deep bowl (to prevent leaks) and away from other open foods.
- Keep them cool (4°C – 8°C is good). Remember, these are live animals so you don't want to freeze them.
- Do NOT re-immerses oysters in water. They will have been properly purified at the depuration centre and any further immersion risks re-contaminating them.
- If stored as shown above the oysters should last at least 5 days.



Handling

- Wash your hands thoroughly before opening the oysters.
- Ensure that the knives and other equipment (including gloves if you wear them) used for opening the oysters and the area you are working in are all clean before you start.
- Check that the outside shells of the oysters are clean and avoid pushing any mud or bits of shell into the oyster as you open it.
- Use a cleaned or different shucking knife for each batch
- Serve promptly.

Food Handlers Fitness to work

- It is important to ensure that any food handlers suffering from gastrointestinal illness are excluded from work relating to food handling duties and that they cannot enter a food handling area. This exclusion is usually for 48 hours after an individual no longer shows symptoms of illness. This is particularly important when handling products that are served raw, such as oysters.
- Bacteria and viruses can still be found in someone's faeces after symptoms stop. It is therefore important that managers continue to exclude food handlers for a period of time after this. It is recommended that people should be excluded for 48 hours after they stop showing symptoms of diarrhoea.

Further Information

For further information contact your local Environmental Health team:

Commercial Team
Environmental Health
Legal, Public Protection and Housing Services
Civic Offices
Holton Road
Barry
CF63 4RU

Information on oysters and other shellfish can be found on the internet at:

www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/farming/foods/shellfish/
www.seafish.org/