



The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) has issued a Food Safety Information Notice in relation to implementing effective strategies to manage norovirus risks in oysters, with the aim of reducing the incidence of contaminated oysters in the market and minimizing the occurrence of norovirus-related illnesses.

Legislative Basis/Relevant Documentation

- [EU Regulation 178/2022 Article 14 \(General Food Law\)](#)
- [FSAI Norovirus Opinion](#)
- [EFSA scientific opinion NoV methods, limits and control methods](#)

Glossary of Terms

Below is a glossary of terms and acronyms used in this document.

Terms / Acronyms	Description
Norovirus (NoV)	A virus causing acute gastroenteritis, often resulting in diarrhoea and vomiting.
FBO	Food Business Operator
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, a systematic preventive approach to food safety.

Introduction:

Norovirus (NoV), commonly known as the “winter vomiting bug”, is a significant cause of acute gastroenteritis often causing diarrhoea and vomiting. The virus is transmitted through the consumption of food or water contaminated with faecal matter or through contact with infected individuals or surfaces. It is prevalent in the community and can be present in discharges from even advanced wastewater treatment systems, which may not entirely eliminate NoV.

Bivalve molluscs such as oysters are known to accumulate and concentrate NoV. This poses a particular health risk as these shellfish are often consumed raw or lightly cooked, making them a potential source of infection.

Summary:

The consumption of oysters contaminated with NoV presents a significant public health risk. It is vital that Food Business Operators (FBOs) involved in oyster production are cognisant of this risk and implement appropriate management measures, especially during the high-risk winter period. These measures should be a part of their food safety management system, adhering to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles.

The SFPA would like to remind the Shellfish Producers of the comprehensive guidance to assist shellfish producers in mitigating the risk of norovirus contamination in oysters, which was developed by SFPA along with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), the Marine Institute (MI) and Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM). Currently, there is no regulatory limit for Norovirus in legislation relating to shellfish.

The detailed guidance is available on the SFPA website at the following link:

[Interim Guidance on the Management of Norovirus in Oysters by Shellfish Producers](#)

“The purpose of this document is to provide information regarding the risk of norovirus during winter months. For the avoidance of doubt, this information does not constitute legal advice or analysis and should not be relied upon as such. Whilst every effort is made and relevant material is published, no responsibility is accepted by, or on behalf of the SFPA, for any errors, omissions, or misleading statements on these pages.”

Food Safety Information Notice 01-2024

Guidance on Management of Norovirus for Shellfish Producers



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Further Advice:

For additional information and resources, please refer to the following:

- Opinion by the Scientific Committee of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) to assist and inform FBOs and risk managers re: risk -based measures to protect consumers from illness.

[Risk Management of Norovirus in Oysters - Opinion by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Scientific Committee](#)

- Guidance on assessment of virus testing laboratories for FBOs and Competent Authorities and summary note considers the current position on laboratory testing for viruses both in the EU and internationally and makes recommendations on best practice regarding laboratory methodology and quality assurance from the European Union Reference Laboratory for monitoring the bacteriological and viral contamination of live bi-valve molluscs.

[Guidance Note Norovirus Testing CEFAS](#)

- Guidance for issues involving the safety and suitability of a food product to clarify and standardise procedures for the identification and removal of unsafe and, where necessary, other non-compliant food from the food chain.

[FSAI Guidance Note 10 Product Recall and Traceability](#)

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