GUIDANCE ON THE HANDLING OF LIVE OYSTERS AT RETAIL AND CATERING OUTLETS

Handling and serving live oysters is different to handling and serving 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. 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. 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 dated health/ID mark on an indelible, water resistant label like the one shown below.
• This label shows the identification number of the establishment from which they may have come (in the ellipse), ideally a batch number, date of packaging and declaration that animals must be alive when sold. Alternatively, a minimum durability date could be used.
• These details should be sufficient to identify the actual bed from which the oysters were harvested. Keep the health mark details for at least 60 days in case this information is needed. The easiest way to do this is to affix the label into your diary on the day of delivery.
• 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.

RECEPTION AND HANDLING OF OYSTERS

• Check the health mark. If there is not a health mark, the consignment should be rejected.
• You should also check that the oysters have been transported in a clean and cool vehicle, without being mixed with raw fish.

STORAGE

• Store the oysters in a deep bowl (to prevent leaks) and away from other open foods. Do not store below raw meat or fish
• Keep them cool (ideally 4°C – 8°C) Do NOT re-immers oysters in water. They will have been properly purified at the depuration centre and any further immersion risks re-contaminating them.
• Do not seal live oysters in an airtight container – they will not be able to breathe and will die.
• Do not store on ice – they may die.
• The display and keeping of oysters on seaweed is discouraged

HANDLING

• Wash (and dry) your hands thoroughly using warm soapy water, before handling and opening the oysters.
• Ensure that the knives and other equipment (including gloves if you wear them) used for opening the oysters 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. Ideally only shuck oysters to order.

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.

In the event of your customers informing you that they have been ill as a result of eating oysters at your premises, contact your local Environmental Health Officer and provide details of the relevant label.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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

www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/farmingfood/shellfish/
www.seafish.org/ www.shellfish.org.uk/
http://www.shellfish.org.uk/how_to_videos.htm

Find out more about the work we do at http://www.newforest.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=45 or you can contact us on 023 8028 5000.