Recreational or Sport Shellfishing

Is it safe to harvest and eat my own oysters, clams, and mussels?

Most coastal states, counties, or cities provide and monitor areas for recreational public harvesting of oysters, clams, or mussels. Water and/or shellfish in these harvest areas are routinely tested * to ensure they do not contain bacteria or viruses from sewage, toxins from natural algal blooms, or other contaminants that can cause human illness. If harmful contaminants are present, the area is closed to harvesting and signs are posted to warn of the danger.

Some states may require a permit and/or licenses to recreationally harvest shellfish and/or set limits on the amount you may harvest. Check with the department or agency responsible for monitoring public harvest areas in your state, county, or city or use the links below to locate information by state.

Alabama: www.outdooralabama.com/fishing/saltwater/regulations
California: Quarantines and Health Advisories for Sport-Harvested Shellfish (www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/ddwem/environmental/Shelffish/default.htm)
Sport Fishing Regulations, Licenses & Tags (www.dfg.ca.gov/)
Shellfish Information Hotline: 1-800-553-4133
Delaware: www.fw.delaware.gov/Fisheries/FishingInfo.htm
Florida: myfwc.com/marine/recreational/recshellfish.htm
Georgia: crd.dnr.state.ga.us/content/displaycontent.asp?txtDocument=299
Louisiana: www.wlf.state.la.us/apps/netgear/index.asp?cn=lawlf&pid=101
Maryland: www.dnr.state.md.us/fisheries/regulations/recregchrt.html
Massachusetts: www.mass.gov/dfwele/dmf/recreationalfishing/rec_index.htm#shellfish
Mississippi: www.dmr.state.ms.us
New Hampshire: www.des.state.nh.us/wmb/shellfish/
New Jersey: www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/saltwater.htm
New York: www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dfwmr/marine/shellfish/index.html
North Carolina: www.ncfisheries.net/recreational/recguide.htm
Oregon: www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/regulations/sport_shellfish/
Rhode Island: www.dem.ri.gov/topics/mftopics.htm
South Carolina: www.dnr.state.sc.us/marine/shellfish/regs.html
Texas: www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/annual/fish/oysterreg/
Virginia: www.vdh.state.va.us/shellfish/index.asp
Washington: wdfw.wa.gov/fishcorn.htm

* NOTE: Since Vibrio bacteria are naturally present in marine waters and are not a serious threat to most consumers, harvest areas are not tested for Vibrio. Therefore, it is not safe for high-risk consumers to eat raw or undercooked oysters, clams, or mussels from either commercial or recreational public harvest areas, even if the area is approved for harvesting. Thorough cooking of shellfish kills Vibrio bacteria. For more information about who is at risk for Vibrio vulnificus infection, please visit the website www.SafeOysters.org and read the introduction section for Consumers.