



Front Line Food Safety

Food safety resources
for food managers and supervisors
to train food service workers

September 2026

Special Requirements for Shellstock

Q: What is included in the Food Code definition of MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH?

A: Any edible species of fresh or frozen oysters, clams, mussels or scallops (or the edible portions of them)

Q: Are there any exceptions?

A: Yes, shucked scallops consisting only of the adductor muscle.

Q: Are there any restrictions on where FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS source the SHELLSTOCK (raw, in-shell MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH) they sell or serve?

A: Only MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH from a source listed in the Interstate Certified Shellfish Shippers List may be sold or served.



Q: What should one look for when receiving SHELLSTOCK?

A: The SHELLSTOCK should be reasonably free of mud and debris.



Q: Does SHELLSTOCK have to be received alive?

A: Yes. Dead SHELLSTOCK or SHELLSTOCK with badly broken shells must be discarded.

Q: How can you tell if SHELLSTOCK is alive?

A: Live oysters and clams will be tightly closed and should have no chips on the shell edges. They should sound solid when tapped with a plastic utensil. Mussels may be open or closed. If open, squeeze them gently and see if they close or start to close.

Q: Does a SHELLSTOCK container have to have a tag or label on it when it is received?

A: Yes, there must be a legible tag or label affixed by the harvester or DEALER that depurates, ships, or reships the SHELLSTOCK.

Photo credit: Sacramento County Health Department

Q: What information must be on a SHELLSTOCK tag or label?

A: The SHELLSTOCK tag must include:

1. the harvester's identification number, or
2. the DEALER'S name, address, and CERTIFICATION NUMBER and the original shipper's CERTIFICATION NUMBER,

The tag must also include:

1. the date the SHELLSTOCK was harvested,
2. the harvest location or aquaculture site and the abbreviation of the state or country where the SHELLSTOCK was harvested,
3. the type and quantity of SHELLSTOCK, and
4. the following statement: **"THIS TAG IS REQUIRED TO BE ATTACHED UNTIL CONTAINER IS EMPTY (OR RETAGGED) AND THEREAFTER KEPT ON FILE FOR 90 DAYS"**.

Q: Does SHELLSTOCK have to be date marked when it is received or when the bag or container is opened?

A: No

The most effective ways of preventing shellfish from causing illness are to cook it thoroughly and to be certain that the shellfish is obtained from a certified shellfish shipper.



Q: Can SHELLSTOCK from several bags or containers be consolidated into one bag or container?

A: No, SHELLSTOCK from one tagged or labeled bag or container can't be commingled with SHELLSTOCK from another bag or container with a different harvest date or from a different harvest area or with a different CERTIFICATION NUMBER.

Q: Does shellstock in a display case have to have the tag or label?

A: SHELLSTOCK may be removed from the bag or container in which they were received and then displayed on drained ice or held in a display container if:

1. the SHELLSTOCK is protected from contamination,
2. SHELLSTOCK from different bags or containers is not commingled, and
3. careful records are kept identifying the SHELLSTOCK on display with the information on the tag or label.



Q: Does live shellfish have to be refrigerated?

A: Yes, it is a TIME/TEMPERATURE CONTROL FOR SAFETY FOOD. It should be refrigerated at 41°F or lower.

Q: To what temperature should MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH be cooked?

A: 145°F or higher for at least 15 seconds.

Q: Can MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH be served raw or cooked to less than 145°F?

A: Yes, if:

1. The FOOD ESTABLISHMENT does not serve a HIGHLY SUSCEPTIBLE POPULATION such as pre-school age children, older adults, or persons who are immunocompromised such as at a child or adult care center, nursing home, assisting living facility, hospital, or senior center, and
2. The raw or undercooked MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH is served or sold only upon CONSUMER request, and
3. The FOOD ESTABLISHMENT discloses to the CONSUMER that consuming raw or partially cooked MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH carries a significantly increased risk of foodborne illness and a written reminder is provided on the menu, on a placard, on a product label, or by other effective means the following warning – ***"Consuming raw or undercooked meats, poultry, seafood, shellfish, or eggs may increase your risk of foodborne illness, especially for children, elderly, immunocompromised individuals, and persons with certain medical conditions"***.

Q: Where in the refrigerator should MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH be stored?

A: To prevent cross contamination, MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH must be stored on a shelf below all READY-TO-EAT FOODS and above foods that must be cooked to a higher temperature like ground beef or eggs (155°F) or poultry or stuffed meats (165°F).

Shellfish are filter feeders. They can filter up to 50 gallons of water a day. If bacteria or viruses are present in the water where the shellfish are harvested, the shellfish can concentrate them. This can pose serious health risks, especially to children, the elderly, and those who are immunocompromised.

Q: What must be done when the last SHELLSTOCK from a bag or container is served or sold to a CONSUMER?

A: The date when the last SHELLSTOCK from a bag or container is served or sold to a CONSUMER must be recorded on the tag or label.

Q: For how long must the tags or labels be retained after the last SHELLSTOCK from a bag or container is served or sold to a CONSUMER?

A: 90 days

Q: How must the retained SHELLSTOCK tags or labels be organized?

A: The tags or labels must be kept in chronological order based on the date when the last SHELLSTOCK from a bag or container is served or sold.

If people become ill from eating SHELLFISH, the SHELLSTOCK tags or labels allow the SHELLFISH to be traced back to the place where it was harvested. Those waters can then be closed to further harvesting until the source of contamination can be identified and eliminated.

Q: Can recreationally harvested SHELLSTOCK be sold or served in a FOOD ESTABLISHMENT?

A: No, only SHELLSTOCK from a source listed in the Interstate Certified Shellfish Shippers List (ICSSL) may be sold or served. The ICSSL can be found at:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FederalStateFoodPrograms/ucm2006753.htm>

Q: What if a bag or container of SHELLSTOCK does not have a tag or label or has a tag or label that does not contain all the required information?

A: A bag or container of SHELLSTOCK that does not have a tag or label or that has a tag or label that does not contain all the required information is subject to a HOLD ORDER by the Health Department.

For more information, contact your local health department at: