

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:makeith@mail.ifas.ufl.edu**Safe Seafood Season**

How often have you seen a truck selling “fresh shrimp”, or clams, or fish along the side of the road, and wondered if their stuff was really safe? Or wondered if there was any control over who was selling or what they were selling? Some people wonder, because they call to ask me. Since I’m not an inspector and can’t go checking every one out, here are some guidelines.

If they are selling they should be inspected and have a license from the Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services. You should ask to see two things - a current sticker on the truck, and a letter from DACS, on *watermarked* paper (that means there should be a design in the paper, underneath the writing). The letter should have a current date, and the number in the letter should match the number of the sticker on the truck.

If they don’t have these two items, they have probably not been inspected or licensed. You can call the Dept of Agriculture and Consumer Services to report them. The phone number is 800-435-7352. Whether a DACS inspector can get there before they pack up and move to another corner is another question, but it doesn’t hurt to try! After all, it’s your health they are putting at risk.

If you decide to go ahead and check out the product, what do you look for? If it’s clams or oysters they have, make sure the shells are closed. If they’re open, they must close when you tap them. An open shell that stays open is a dead clam, and not one that you want to eat. They should smell like fresh seaweed, not real strong, just mild.

Shrimp should be firm, not mushy. If you squeeze one it should bounce back, not keep a dent where you pinched it. The shells should stick tightly to the flesh and all the legs should be there and firmly attached. If the shells are loose or the legs fall off easily, these are not fresh shrimp! As with shellfish, fresh shrimp should smell like a fresh sea breeze.

Once you make a purchase, along the road or in a store, handle and prepare your seafood safely. Keep it chilled, on ice or in the refrigerator at all times. Use within five days of purchase. If you buy frozen shellfish, don't thaw them, just cook from frozen.

Cooking is the final step in safe handling. Here in Florida we suffer from one of the highest rates of poisoning from a bacteria in clams and oysters. *Vibrio vulnificus* is a nasty little germ. It doesn't cause much diarrhea, but lots of infections and blood poisoning. Some people will get sick from fewer than 100 bacteria. Between 50 and 90% of the people who get sick do not recover.

Regardless of who told you, hot sauce, lemon juice and alcohol (or beer) do not kill *Vibrio*. Even one contaminated oyster can be enough to kill a person, and there is no way to tell by look, smell or feel if your oyster is safe or not.

The only safe way to eat clams and oysters is to cook them completely. Boil them in the shell for 3 to 5 minutes after the shells pop open. If you steam them, keep them cooking for 4 to 9 minutes after the pot is fully steaming. If the oysters are shucked, boil or simmer for at least 3 minutes, till the edges curl. You can fry or broil them for at least 3 minutes, or bake them for 10 minutes at 450° F.

Here's a citrus-y sauce to top your freshly steamed clams. Be sure to keep the pot steaming for those extra 4-9 minutes for safety.

Orange Cream Sauce on Clams

36 Florida littleneck clams in-the-shell	2 cups white wine
½ cup dairy sour cream (or plain yogurt)	3 Tbsp Florida orange juice
1 tsp horseradish	1 tsp grated Florida orange peel

Scrub clams well. Add to wine and simmer in large saucepan. When shells open, set timer and simmer an additional 8-9 minutes. Remove clams from pan and let cool. With knife or spoon loosen meat but leave in shell. Combine sour cream (or yogurt), orange juice and peel and horseradish in small dish. Mix well. Place 1/4 tsp of sauce on each clam. Arrange on platter to serve. (A layer of rock salt makes it easy to keep the clams in place.) For added elegance and flavor, top with a tiny dab of caviar. Serves 6.

(Recipe courtesy of the FL Dept. of Ag. and Consumer Services)

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