



**Information regarding the current shellfish closure in
Wellfleet associated with a norovirus outbreak
October 28, 2016**

On October 13th, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) closed all waters within Wellfleet Harbor to shellfishing with the exception of bay and sea scallop adductor muscles and carnivorous snails including conchs and whelks. The closure notice can be seen [here](#). The closure of designated shellfish growing areas CCB11-CCB14 was a result of a determination by the Commonwealth's Department of Public Health (DPH) that multiple illnesses had been linked to the consumption of shellfish harvested from the area.¹ The DPH Public Health Advisory related to the norovirus outbreak can be viewed in the footnote² below. Public health officials received reports of approximately 75 suspect cases of norovirus over two days, primarily associated with eating raw shellfish at events and at restaurants in the Outer Cape Cod area. Further investigations by Department of Public Health epidemiologists following the closure confirmed that the cause of the illness outbreak was norovirus.

Removal of any shellfish (seed or market size) from aquaculture sites for offsite culling was originally prohibited. This prohibition on offsite culling was amended on October 25th. Aquaculturists are now allowed to transfer seed shellfish to offsite locations. Work to maintain gear or shellfish aquaculture sites will be allowed provided the grower gives prior daily notice to the local shellfish department who will maintain a daily list. Sale of seed shellfish from Wellfleet Harbor for purposes of aquaculture or propagation is prohibited except for within Wellfleet Harbor.

Shellfish Recall

Officials from the DMF notified the Town of Wellfleet and shellfish harvesters in the area about the closure. The DPH Food Protection Program notified all businesses and wholesale dealers to recall any affected shellfish that was harvested on or after September 26, 2016.

DMF also assisted growers with the retrieval and replanting of 180,000 oysters and 50,000 quahogs from primary shellfish buyers (wholesale dealers). These shellfish will be available for harvest once Wellfleet Harbor is reopened.

¹ CCB10, also lies within Wellfleet Harbor but is a prohibited area due to bacterial contamination.

² DPH Public Health Advisory related to the norovirus outbreak can be viewed [here](#).

About Noroviruses

Noroviruses are easily spread through food, person-to-person contact, contact with contaminated surfaces such as countertops or door knobs or exposure to domestic sewage. These viruses can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal cramps. Other symptoms may include headache, fever, chills and muscle aches.

For most people, noroviruses cause a very unpleasant but brief illness that usually lasts 1 to 2 days. The elderly, very young and those with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of more serious illness from noroviruses. The greatest danger is from dehydration. [Download this Fact Sheet](#) to learn about prevention of norovirus infection.

Importance of Shellfish to Wellfleet's Economy

The Division of Marine Fisheries and Department of Public health are keenly aware of the importance of shellfish to Wellfleet's economy. Wellfleet supports 71 Shellfish aquaculturists who culture oysters and quahogs and soft shell clams on over 259 acres of tidal lands throughout the harbor. Wellfleet ranks among the top three MA communities in terms of cultured shellfish production (6.7 million oysters and 5.9 million quahogs in 2015) and value (over \$5 million in 2015). In addition, 138 commercial and 891 recreational shellfishing permits were issued in 2016. When secondary support businesses are added to the picture, access to shellfish is critical to maintaining the economic engine within the community.

Norovirus Risk Assessment

DMF and DPH personnel have formulated an action plan to assess the norovirus outbreak, and try to identify the source of the virus. DMF will have teams conducting pollution surveys early next week. The FDA will also be collaborating by offering the assistance of their specialists and laboratory facilities at Dauphin Island, Alabama to determine if shellfish are free of noroviruses.

With the assistance of the local Board of Health (BOH), shellfish constable and harbormaster, DMF and DPH will follow the NSSP Chapter II RISK ASSESSMENT and RISK MANAGEMENT requirements for Outbreaks of Shellfish-Related Illness to determine the source of norovirus that caused the outbreak, and if there is an ongoing source of contamination. In order to make these determinations, DMF will conduct the following:

- A shoreline survey to evaluate real and potential pollution sources of the affected growing areas.
- Water sampling in the harbor and fecal coliform analysis of all nearby potential pollution sources.

- A review of the Town of Wellfleet's live aboard policy for boats in the area.
- Site visit and appraisal of the marina facility in the harbor.
- A review of the town's records relative to the status of all adjacent properties' septic systems.
- A written report summarizing findings.

FDA requires a minimum 21 day closure following a confirmed norovirus outbreak within shellfish growing areas; assuming that all required risk assessment described above is satisfactorily completed with testing that confirms the absence of noroviruses in shellfish. Once all these criteria are met and FDA concurs, Wellfleet Harbor can be reopened to the harvest of shellfish, possibly as early as November 17, 2016.