

## Shellfish classification

The classification of a production area determines the treatment required before the Live Bivalve molluscs (LBMs) may be marketed for human consumption.

LBM production and relay areas are classified according to the levels of E. coli detected in shellfish flesh.

### **Permitted levels of E. coli**

Levels of E. coli are measured per 100g flesh.

In all cases, the health standards are set out in:

- Annex III of European Community Regulation 853/2004
- Annex II of European Community Regulation 854/2004

The end product microbiological criteria specified in the European Regulation 2073/2005 must also be met.

The production area will be classified as A, B or C, with A as the least and C as the most contaminated. The level of treatment required to remove contamination from the LBMs after harvesting depends on this classification. If contamination levels are consistently so high that a class C cannot be achieved then harvesting from the area may be prohibited.

The standards that must be achieved and the level of treatment required for each classification are:

#### **Class A**

- minimum of 10 samples required per year
- 80% of sample results must be less than or equal to 230 E. coli/100g
- no results may exceed 700 E. coli/100g

LBMs can be harvested for direct human consumption if the end product standard requirements are met.

#### **Class B**

- minimum of 8 samples required per year
- 90% of sample results must be less than or equal to 4600 E. coli/100g
- No sample result may exceed 46000 E. coli/100g

LBMs can be supplied for human consumption after one of three processes. The options are:

- purification in an approved establishment
- relaying for at least one month in a classified Class A relaying area
- an EC approved heat treatment process

For class B beds in England and Wales, there is a long term classification (LTC) system. This is in place to show greater stability in the classifications which are based on compliance over five years instead of the standard three years.

## **Class C**

- minimum of 8 samples required per year
- All sample results must be less than or equal to 46000 E. coli/100g

LBMs can only be sold for human consumption after completing one of three possible processes.

These processes are:

- relaying for at least two months in an approved class B relaying area followed by treatment in an approved purification centre
- relaying for at least two months in an approved class A relaying area
- after an EC approved heat treatment process

## **Prohibited areas**

Molluscs from areas with consistently prohibited level results (greater than 46000 E. coli/100g) must not be subject to production or be harvested.

## **Shellfish Purification**

Shellfish can be purified (depurated) by holding them in purpose built tanks of clean or artificial seawater. The shellfish are placed in water for the time necessary to reduce contamination to make them fit for human consumption. The water conditions encourage the shellfish to filter out contaminants such as *E. coli*.

Dispatch centres are any on-shore or off-shore area that processes live bivalve molluscs fit for human consumption.

All purification and dispatch establishments must be approved by your local authority. You must meet the specific requirements for purification and dispatch centres in Annex III of Regulation (EC) 853/2004.

For further information on purification and approval please refer to our [Purification Guide](#).

## **Application process**

### **Filling out the form**

The production and relay area application form should be completed by the applicant and the Local authority.

This form needs to be forwarded to us with a suitable map and any other relevant supporting information as specified in the form.

The preferred format is a copy of an:

- OS 1:25,000
- 1:50,000 map

- Admiralty chart with the position and extent of the shellfish beds clearly marked

[Application form for classification of shellfish harvesting area](#) (681.92 KB)

[Application checklist for shellfish](#) (19.61 KB)

Northern Ireland

[Application form for classification in Northern Ireland](#) (375.71 KB)

## After you've sent the form

Once we receive your application, it is verified by us and we will ask for further information or clarification if needed. Once we are satisfied, we will send it to our contractor to undertake a Provisional Representative Monitoring Point (PRMP) assessment, if it's necessary.

A PRMP assessment is an assessment of the pollution sources affecting the area, to find appropriate sampling points and determine a sampling plan.

Ten samples at least a week apart are required for a provisional classification. After a full year of sampling, you will be given an annual classification.

In some cases, a preliminary classification can be given. Further information on the classification process is available in the classification protocols.

## Classification protocol

When a shellfish bed has been closed indefinitely additional samples may be required before a bed may be re-opened. The classification process may have to start again if it is closed for a number of years or if has been declassified.

You can apply for classification in England and Wales using our application form.

[Protocol for the Classification of Shellfish production and relaying areas in England and Wales](#)

There is more information on the classification protocols for Northern Ireland.

You can apply for classification in Northern Ireland using our application form.

Northern Ireland

[Protocol for the Classification of Shellfish production and relaying areas in Northern Ireland](#) (556.56 KB)

## Dealing with high results

Local action groups exist in England and Wales.

For further information please refer to our Local action group guidance.

A local action group is led by your local authority and can include local industry groups,

fishermen or shellfish gatherers. This group deal with high results and consider whether to:

- close the bed
- notify harvesters

Local action groups could also liaise with the Environment Agency in England.

Local action groups could also liaise with Natural Resources Wales.

## Action plans

Local action plans are decided using local factors and conditions. The amount of detail in the plan will depend on:

- the number and size of shellfish beds under the responsibility of the local food authority
- any special local conditions
- the number of stakeholders involved

## Action states

Action states apply to all classes of shellfish beds. It will be in place after your results have been found to be above the permitted level.

A bed may be temporarily downgraded or closed as part of short term control measures during an Action State.

To re-open the bed at its previous classification, two consecutive satisfactory samples taken at least seven days apart.

We start investigating into classification results that are, for example, above the threshold for the classification awarded.

Information from DAERA, NIEA and harvesters will be asked for to try to establish the cause of the higher result and determine future action.

Any areas with results above the permitted level will be closed for harvesting.

## Current classification lists

### England and Wales

[Shellfish Classifications England and Wales 2018-2019](#) (633.32 KB)

### Northern Ireland

[Shellfish Harvesting Classifications Northern Ireland 2019](#) (242.84 KB)

## Classification monitoring results

- [England and Wales](#)

- Northern Ireland

## Resources

[Local action group guidance](#) (721.92 KB)