

Croatia's top oyster farmers in alarm after norovirus found

March 11 2019, by Eldar Emric



In this Friday, March 8, 2019 photo, Branko Radic, an oyster farmer opens an oyster shell in Mali Ston, southern Croatia. Authorities have detected norovirus, a bug that causes diarrhea and vomiting, in parts of the Mali Ston bay, raising alarm among the breeders who are proud of their industry. (AP Photo/Eldar Emric)

Oyster farming is the pride of this small town in the south of Croatia's Adriatic Sea coast. But tasting the famed local delicacy may not be a

good idea at the moment.

Authorities have detected norovirus, which causes diarrhea and vomiting, in parts of the Mali Ston bay—triggering shock and alarm among the breeders.

The traditional oyster-tasting feast in March has been canceled and fears are mounting of huge financial losses to the [local community](#) that harvests about 3 million oysters each year.

Experts are pointing their fingers at the outdated sewage system in the area that has seen a rise in the numbers of tourists flocking to Croatia's stunning Adriatic coast.

"I am really sorry but people themselves are to blame that something like this happened," explained Vlado Onofri from the Institute for Marine and Coastal Research in nearby Dubrovnik. "It's something that has to be solved in the future."

While some stomach bugs can be eliminated with cooking, norovirus survives at relatively [high temperatures](#).

"The problem with oysters is that they are eaten raw," Onofri said.

Stunned locals pointed out their oysters are famous for high quality—a 1936 award from a London international exhibition still hangs on the wall in Svetan Pejic's La Koruna restaurant in Mali Ston.



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"Our oyster here is really a special oyster ... and this is the only place (in the world) where it can be found," he insisted. "Everyone wants to take our oysters and try to breed them elsewhere."

Navigating the oyster fields in their small boats, the farmers proudly show visitors rows and rows of [oyster](#)-filled underwater farm beds spreading through the bay.

Top municipal official Vedran Antunica questioned the assumption that the local sewage system was to blame for the outbreak.

"Viruses are everywhere, now as we speak, the air is full of [viruses](#)," Antunica said. "We had the same sewage system in the past, so why wasn't it (norovirus) recorded? What has changed?"



This Friday, March 8, 2019 aerial photo shows an oyster farm in Mali Ston, southern Croatia. Authorities have detected norovirus, a bug that causes diarrhea and vomiting, in parts of the Mali Ston bay, raising alarm among the breeders who are proud of their industry. (AP Photo/Eldar Emric)



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