Shellfish harvest back on

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COMMERCIAL TWP. — The ban on the harvest of shellfish in Delaware Bay has been lifted, effective today, after sampling determined that the waters meet the criteria for safe harvest.

The harvest was suspended on June 24 after unacceptable levels of the bacterium Vibrio polyhaemolyticus (Vp) were found. Vibrio reached record levels in the bay earlier this week. No illnesses were reported but the harvest suspension was a precautionary measure under guidelines of the federal Shellfish Sanitation Act.

VP is found in all marine waters, but occasionally a pathogenic strain occurs when the weather and water is warmer, usually in June.

Oystermen have taken precautionary measures to make sure Vp doesn’t spread on harvested oysters by keeping them cool on board the boat by wetting and covering with a tarpaulin and by getting them into refrigeration as soon as possible after landing.

They also had harvested only during the cooler morning hours.

The bay was closed to the oyster harvest previously in 2002 after one illness that may have come from Delaware Bay occurred.

The bacterium can be killed by cooking raw seafood. Illnesses have been found only when shellfish was eaten raw and seems to mainly affect those with impaired immunity, the elderly or the very young.

Bob Connell, chief of the Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring, had said on Tuesday that more samples would be taken on Wednesday and it probably would be known by Friday whether the bay could reopen.

Monitoring for VP will continue through September.