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Paralytic Shellfish Toxin Rises to a Dangerous Level in Whatcom County

BELLINGHAM—Paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) biotoxin has increased to a dangerous level in mussels from Birch Bay according to weekly monitoring reports from Whatcom County Health Department and the Washington State Department of Health (DOH). PSP toxin levels are high enough to cause illness. Beaches from Sandy Point north to the Canadian Border including all of Point Roberts remain closed to the harvest of molluscan shellfish.

Recent test results demonstrate how quickly conditions can change. PSP level in mussels from Birch Bay increased seven-fold over the previous week. PSP toxin levels in molluscan shellfish are rising in all areas of northern Whatcom County.

The Whatcom County Health Department and DOH monitor shellfish weekly when biotoxins are present.

If you harvest molluscan shellfish from local beaches, please be aware that:

- PSP biotoxin can be deadly – don't risk your life! Avoid harvesting all species of molluscan shellfish during a closure.
- Mussels and varnish clams usually contain more toxin than other species during a closure.
- Biotoxin levels in clams and oysters are not routinely monitored until toxin levels in mussels drop. Assume all molluscan shellfish are unsafe in the closure zone.
- Biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking.
- Shellfish sold in stores and restaurants are tested before shipping and are safe to consume.
- You can “know before you dig”. Always check the (DOH) biotoxin web site at: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Shellfish/RecreationalShellfish> or the telephone hotline at 1-800-562-5632.

For more information about biotoxins in Washington, visit the DOH web site at: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/TopicSearch?tag=Biotoxins> or call our office at (360) 778-6000.

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