



June 28, 2017 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Paralytic Shellfish Toxin Closes Shellfish Harvest on All Beaches in Whatcom County

BELLINGHAM—All of Whatcom County, including all of Point Roberts and all of Larrabee State Park, is now closed to the harvest of molluscan shellfish due to the presence of paralytic shellfish poisoning biotoxin (PSP). PSP levels have recently increased in southern Whatcom County and are now above the closure limit.

PSP biotoxin remains at a dangerous level in mussels from Birch Bay and Drayton Harbor. PSP toxin levels are high enough to cause illness. Clams and other molluscan shellfish species are likely to contain toxin as well.

The Whatcom County Health Department and Washington State Department of Health (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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