

**WHATCOM COUNTY
Health Department**

*Leading the community in promoting
health and preventing disease.*



Regina A. Delahunt
Director

Greg Stern, M.D.
Health Officer

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[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE]

Media Contact: John Wolpers, Environmental Health Manager
Phone: (360) 676-6724,
E-mail address: jwolpers@whatcomcounty.us

PSP BIOTOXIN CLOSURE HAS BEEN ISSUED FOR BEACHES FROM BIRCH POINT SOUTH TO SANDY POINT

BELLINGHAM—Paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) biotoxin has increased to unsafe levels in molluscan shellfish on beaches from Birch Point south to Sandy Point. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has issued a recreational molluscan shellfish harvest closure for all species on beaches from Birch Point south to Sandy Point including Birch Bay. Portage Bay remains closed to the harvest of varnish clams only.

The Whatcom County Health Department collects routine shellfish samples to monitor biotoxin levels throughout the year. We notify the public when biotoxin levels pose a danger to public health.

Algae that contain marine biotoxins cannot be seen, and must be detected by laboratory testing. Biotoxin levels can quickly change. Therefore, always check the DOH website at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm> or call the DOH Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632 before harvesting shellfish anywhere in Washington State.

Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters, and scallops. During a biotoxin event, mussels and varnish clams usually contain the highest toxin concentration. PSP and other naturally occurring biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking or freezing. Crab meat is not affected, but “crab butter” and crab entrails can harbor biotoxins so they should always be discarded. Shellfish sold in restaurants and markets have been tested before distribution and are safe to eat.

Before harvesting, also remember to check harvest seasons and licensing requirements. Contact the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife for information about licensing and fishing regulations at www.dfw.wa.gov.

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