

WHATCOM COUNTY
Health Department
509 Girard Street
Bellingham, WA 98225



Regina A. Delahunt, Director
Greg Stern, MD, Health Officer
<http://www.whatcomcounty.us/health>



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Tom Kunesh

Phone: 360-676-6724; extension #50832

E-mail address: tkunesh@whatcomcounty.us

PSP Biotoxin levels increase in Bellingham Bay and decrease in Northern Whatcom County

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) biotoxin levels have recently increased in Bellingham Bay and now exceed the limit for safe harvest. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has closed all of Bellingham Bay, Portage Bay, **and** all waters south to the Skagit County line to the harvest of all species of molluscan shellfish. This includes Larrabee State Park. Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters, and scallops.

Meanwhile, PSP biotoxin levels have dropped in northern Whatcom County, allowing DOH to reopen beaches from Sandy Point to Birch Point that have been closed for the past two weeks. This includes Birch Bay.

Algae that contain marine biotoxins cannot be seen, and must be detected by laboratory testing. 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 retail markets have been tested before distribution and are safe to eat.

Biotoxin levels can change rapidly and have been fluctuating since April. Shellfish harvesters are advised to **Know Before You Dig**. Always check for current biotoxin closures at the DOH website: <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.

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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