

**WHATCOM COUNTY
Health Department**

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



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Biotoxin Levels Drop—No Biotoxin-related Beach Closures in Whatcom County

BELLINGHAM—Biotoxin levels have recently decreased in south Whatcom County. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has lifted the biotoxin closure for the recreational harvest of molluscan shellfish for Sandy Point south to the Skagit County line. Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters, and scallops. Currently, there are no biotoxin-related beach closures in Whatcom County.

Biotoxin levels can change rapidly. Paralytic shellfish poison and diarrhetic shellfish poison biotoxin levels have been rising and falling since April. In addition, some beaches remain closed due to impaired water quality. Shellfish harvesters are advised to ***Know Before You Dig***. Always check for current biotoxin and pollution 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. Consult the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife for information about licensing and fishing regulations at <http://wdfw.wa.gov>.

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.

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