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All Whatcom County Beaches Closed to Recreational Shellfish Harvest

BELLINGHAM, WA — The Washington State Department of Health has closed recreational harvest of shellfish for all of Whatcom County due to increased, unsafe levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) biotoxin.

People who collect shellfish to eat should always check for current closures on the Washington Shellfish Safety Map (doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety) or call the DOH Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632 before harvesting shellfish anywhere in Washington State.

Biotoxin levels can change rapidly, and the algae that produce biotoxins cannot be seen. The Whatcom County Health Department routinely collects shellfish samples to test local biotoxin levels in coordination with the Washington State Department of Health. The health department also posts closure signs at public access points to affected beaches.

Marine biotoxins, such as paralytic shellfish poison, are toxins produced by some naturally-occurring algae. The toxins accumulate in molluscan shellfish, which includes clams, mussels, oysters, and scallops. People can become sick from eating shellfish that contain the toxin. Symptoms of paralytic shellfish poisoning include tingling of lips, tongue, fingers, and toes, and can progress to loss of control of arms or legs and difficulty breathing. If enough toxin is consumed, the person can become paralyzed and be unable to breathe.

More information about safely harvesting shellfish is available from the Washington State Department of Health at <https://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Shellfish/RecreationalShellfish>.

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