



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 12, 2020

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Biotoxin Levels Drop on Many Whatcom County Beaches

BELLINGHAM, WA — Paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) biotoxin levels decreased on many Whatcom County beaches recently. Drayton Harbor, Point Roberts, Portage Bay, Chuckanut Bay and Bellingham Bay to the Skagit County line remain closed for butter and varnish clams only. The recent molluscan shellfish harvest closure has been lifted on all other beaches.

The Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) routinely collects shellfish samples to monitor biotoxin levels. We will notify the public whenever biotoxin levels threaten shellfish safety.

Shellfish sold in restaurants and retail markets have been tested before distribution and are safe to eat.

Biotoxin levels can change rapidly. 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.

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. Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters and scallops.

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 www.wdfw.wa.gov.

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