

# WHATCOM COUNTY Health Department

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



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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### **PSP BIOTOXIN CLOSURE IS LIFTED FOR NORTHERN WHATCOM COUNTY BEACHES**

BELLINGHAM—Paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) biotoxin has dropped to safe levels in molluscan shellfish on beaches in Birch Bay and Drayton Harbor. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has lifted the recreational harvest closure for all species of molluscan shellfish on beaches from Sandy Point north to the Canadian border including Points Roberts. 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 will notify the public when biotoxin levels pose a threat 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](http://www.dfw.wa.gov).

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HEALTHIER WHATCOM COUNTY

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