

**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 CAUSES RECREATIONAL SHELLFISH CLOSURE FOR BEACHES
IN NORTHERN WHATCOM COUNTY**

BELLINGHAM—Unsafe levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) biotoxin have been detected in molluscan shellfish on beaches in Birch Bay and Drayton Harbor. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has closed recreational harvest for all species of molluscan shellfish on beaches from Sandy Point north to the Canadian border including Point Roberts. Points Roberts Beaches will be closed as a precaution until shellfish samples can be obtained to determine biotoxin levels.

The Whatcom County Health Department will be collecting additional samples each week to monitor biotoxin levels. We will notify the public when biotoxin levels have dropped below the closure limit.

Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters, and scallops. Mussels 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 be discarded. Shellfish sold in restaurants and markets have been tested before distribution and are safe to eat.

Algae that contain the toxins cannot be seen, and must be detected by laboratory testing. 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.

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