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**May 16, 2018**

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**Biotoxin Levels Rise – Shellfish Harvest Closures Expand in Northern Whatcom County**

**BELLINGHAM, WA** — 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.

The latest results expand the areas in Whatcom County closed to recreational shellfish harvest to include Birch Bay. Previously, only beaches north of Birch Point to the Canadian border were closed. 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.

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.

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

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](http://www.wdfw.wa.gov).

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