



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning Biotoxin at Potentially Lethal Levels in Bellingham Bay**

**BELLINGHAM, WA —**

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) biotoxin is now at potentially lethal levels in Bellingham Bay mussels. PSP levels continue to rise in surrounding waters from Samish Bay to Birch Bay as well. The biotoxin closure has been expanded this week to include all beaches from Birch Point south to the Skagit County line, including all of Larrabee State Park. Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning biotoxin also remains at elevated levels in Bellingham Bay.

Consuming molluscan shellfish - especially mussels - harvested in the affected areas can cause a potentially lethal intoxication.

The Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) 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.

Mussels pick up biotoxins more quickly than other shellfish. Mussels tend to become much more toxic than other shellfish species when biotoxins are present. Algae that contain marine biotoxins cannot be seen, and must be detected by laboratory testing. 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.

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.

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