

**WHATCOM COUNTY
Health Department**

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



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[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE]

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**Birch Bay remains closed to shellfish harvest - Biotoxin levels drop in other
Whatcom County waters**

BELLINGHAM—Birch Bay remains closed to molluscan shellfish harvest. Biotoxin levels have recently decreased in all other Whatcom County waters. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has lifted the biotoxin closure for the recreational harvest of molluscan shellfish from all areas except Birch Bay. Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters, and scallops.

Biotoxin levels can change rapidly. Biotoxin levels have been rising and falling since April. In addition, some beaches remain closed due to impaired water quality. 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.

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.dfw.wa.gov.

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.

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

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WhatcomCountyHealth

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