



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Recreational Shellfish Harvest Upgraded in Southern Whatcom County

BELLINGHAM, WA — Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) and Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP) biotoxin levels have dropped in most species of molluscan shellfish in southern Whatcom County. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has lifted the biotoxin closure for all molluscan shellfish species in Chuckanut Bay and all of Larrabee State Park; and upgraded all other beaches from Bellingham Bay south to the Whatcom/Skagit County border. These beaches are now closed only to the harvest of butter and varnish clams. Some beaches in this area such as Mud Bay and Wildcat Cove remain closed due to nearby sources of fecal pollution.

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

Biotoxin levels can change rapidly, and toxins are not destroyed by cooking or freezing. Recreational shellfish harvesters are advised to always check for current biotoxin and pollution closures on the Washington State Shellfish Safety Map at <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/eh/maps/biotoxin/biotoxin.html> or by calling the DOH Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632 before harvesting shellfish anywhere in Washington State.

PSP, DSP, and other naturally-occurring biotoxins are produced by some species of algae. Molluscan shellfish (clams, mussels, oysters, scallops) eat the algae and retain the toxin. Algae that contain biotoxins cannot be seen and are only detected by laboratory testing.

In partnership with the Washington State Department of Health, the Whatcom County Health Department routinely collects shellfish samples to monitor biotoxin levels and provide notifications when biotoxin levels pose a threat to public health. For more information about the safety of recreational shellfish harvest in Washington, visit <https://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Shellfish/RecreationalShellfish>.

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