Washington State Department of Health

News Release

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Hood Canal shellfish harvest closed: tests detect diarrhetic shellfish poison

Biotoxin can cause illness; shellfish harvesting closed, monitoring continues

OLYMPIA — Diarrhetic Shellfish Poison (DSP) has been detected at unsafe levels in molluscan shellfish from Hood Canal near Brinnon. This is the first time a biotoxin has been found in shellfish from the area. In Jefferson County, recreational shellfish harvesting is closed for all species of shellfish from Seal Rock south to the Mason County line in Hood Canal. This closure is in addition to the existing recreational DSP closure in Dabob and Quilcene Bays.

The state Department of Health's Shellfish Protection program tests shellfish for safety and has also closed recreational shellfish harvesting in Sequim Bay in Clallam County, Discovery, Quilcene, and Dabob Bays in Jefferson County, and some areas of Whatcom, Skagit, and King Counties for elevated DSP toxin levels. In Discovery Bay all species of shellfish are off limits for both recreational and commercial harvesting.

DSP biotoxin is an emerging health threat in the state. In July 2011, three people got sick after eating shellfish from Sequim Bay. These were the first cases of illness ever caused by DSP in the United States. In southern British Columbia, DSP illnesses linked to eating mussels were also identified last year. Diarrhea is the most common symptom of DSP illness, but people may also have nausea, vomiting, and stomach pain. Symptoms may appear within minutes or may take several hours to develop.

DSP biotoxins are produced by algae that are found naturally in the environment. Molluscan shellfish, including clams, cockles, mussels, scallops, and oysters are filter feeders that eat algae. Biotoxins from toxic algae can accumulate in their flesh, making them unsafe to eat even if they are cooked or frozen. The department is working closely with shellfish companies to make sure molluscan shellfish sold in stores are tested for biotoxins before they're shipped to retailers.

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The Department of Health monitors shellfish for DSP and other biotoxins, and updates their toll-free hotline, and website with changes to closures and recommendations. In addition to the DSP closures, several closures for Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) are also in effect in many areas of the state. Recreational shellfish harvesters should always call our Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632 or check our shellfish closure maps before harvesting shellfish anywhere in the state.

The Department of Health website (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

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