



October 5, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**PSP BIOTOXIN CAUSES RECREATIONAL SHELLFISH CLOSURE FOR
BELLINGHAM BAY AND SOUTHERN WHATCOM COUNTY**

BELLINGHAM—Unsafe levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) biotoxin have been detected in molluscan shellfish on beaches in Bellingham Bay. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has closed recreational harvest for all species of molluscan shellfish on beaches from Bellingham Bay south to the Skagit County border, including all of Larrabee State Park.

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.

Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters, and scallops. Mussels 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 be discarded. Shellfish sold in restaurants and markets have been tested before distribution and are safe to eat.

Algae that contain the toxins cannot be seen, and must be detected by laboratory testing. Therefore, always check the DOH website at <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. Also be sure to check with the Washington State Department of Fish and wildlife for open seasons at <http://dfw.wa.gov/>.

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