



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Recreational Shellfish Harvest Open in Most of Whatcom County

BELLINGHAM, WA — Marine biotoxin levels in molluscan shellfish have dropped in most of Whatcom County. As a result the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has lifted the biotoxin closure on recreational shellfish harvesting for all of Whatcom County except Point Roberts. Point Roberts remains closed to the harvest of all species until additional shellfish samples are analyzed.

The Whatcom County Health Department has recently received reports of red-colored plankton blooms in Birch Bay and near Drayton Harbor, but these blooms are not associated with biotoxin closures. Water color is not an accurate measure of shellfish safety. Algae that produce marine biotoxins can only be detected by laboratory testing. Toxic blooms can occur in clear water, and some non-toxic blooms can cause water color to change.

To check if it is safe to harvest shellfish, visit the DOH Shellfish Safety Map at <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/eh/maps/biotoxin/biotoxin.html> or call the DOH Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632. Shellfish safety conditions are updated daily.

Paralytic shellfish poisoning biotoxin and other naturally occurring biotoxins accumulate in molluscan shellfish such as clams, mussels, oysters and scallops. During a biotoxin event, mussels and varnish clams usually contain the highest toxin concentration. Crab meat is not affected, but “crab butter” and crab entrails can harbor biotoxins so they should always be discarded. Biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking or freezing.

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

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