



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 12, 2018

Media Contact: Melissa Morin, Communications Specialist
Phone: (360) 778-6022; (360) 594-2504
E-mail address: mmorin@whatcomcounty.us

Recreational Shellfish Harvest Closed From Bellingham Bay South to Skagit County; Opened on Point Roberts

BELLINGHAM, WA — Biotoxin levels have once again changed, and recreational harvest of molluscan shellfish has been closed on beaches from Bellingham Bay south to the Skagit County line due to increased levels of the diarrhetic shellfish poisoning (DSP) biotoxin. This closure includes all of Larrabee State Park. It does not affect Portage Bay or Lummi Bay.

Meanwhile, recreational shellfish harvest has been reopened on Point Roberts. All beaches north of Sandy Point to the Canadian border are currently open.

The most recent samples illustrate that biotoxin levels can change rapidly. To check that it is safe to harvest shellfish, harvesters are urged to visit the Washington State Department of Health's (DOH) Shellfish Safety Map at <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/eh/maps/biotoxin/biotoxin.html> or to call the DOH Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632. Shellfish safety conditions are updated daily.

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.

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

During a biotoxin event, mussels and varnish clams usually contain the highest toxin concentration. 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.

###

