



# SEASONAL HEALTH ALERT

## Shellfish Poisoning

Issued: June 2020

Contact WAPC at [mryuk@wapc.org](mailto:mryuk@wapc.org) with questions

As warmer weather draws us to shoreline activities, such as shellfish harvesting, the Washington Poison Center is here to keep you safe and healthy with some helpful tips.

- Be aware that algae may contain toxins that can lead to poisoning.
- Algae are often found along our coast and in shellfish.
- The presence of 'red tides' is not an indicator of harmful algae; conversely, toxins may be present in clear water.
- Know before you dig. Beaches sometimes post warning signs. If you see a warning sign, that means it is **not safe to harvest shellfish from that beach**.
- Check the Department of Health Shellfish Safety Map online at: <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/biotoxin/biotoxin.html>
- If you, or someone you know, suspects shellfish poisoning, call the Washington Poison Center at: 1 (800) 222-1222 for help, 24/7/365.



### KNOW YOUR SHELLFISH

- Mussels accumulate algae toxins more quickly than other types of shellfish.
- Varnish clams tend to have higher toxin levels than some other shellfish.
- Butter clams and varnish clams can remain harmful long after other species return to safe levels.
- Neither cooking nor freezing reliably destroys algae toxins in shellfish.
- Cooking shellfish to an internal temperature of 145°F for 15 seconds destroys Vibrio bacteria.

### WHAT TYPES OF POISONS MIGHT AFFECT SOMEONE AFTER EATING SHELLFISH?

- **DIARRHETIC SHELLFISH POISONING (DSP):** affects all shellfish species, poisoning symptoms include profuse diarrhea, along with nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain.
- **AMNESTIC SHELLFISH POISONING (ASP):** affects razor clams, oysters and mussels, poisoning symptoms begin with nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and severe cases can progress to confusion, headache, and short-term memory loss.
- **PARALYTIC SHELLFISH POISONING (PSP):** produced by algae, poisoning symptoms include numbness and tingling of the face and extremities, dizziness, muscle weakness, and difficulty with vision or balance. Weakness may be profound and lead to breathing difficulties that can be fatal.
- **VIBRIOSIS:** seen in warm waters, the rapidly multiplying vibrio bacteria causes Vibriosis. Symptoms include severe diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal cramping. Symptoms may appear days following ingestion. Severe cases may require hospitalization.
- **NOROVIRUS:** enters the water from untreated sewage and may be present in clams, mussels, oysters, geoducks and scallops. It is most often transmitted from eating raw or undercooked shellfish. Norovirus poisoning symptoms include severe diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal cramping. Severe cases may require hospitalization.