



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 30, 2020

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

**Recreational Shellfish Harvest Closed in Bellingham Bay and Chuckanut Bay
Due to Elevated Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning Biotoxin**

BELLINGHAM, WA — Diarrhetic shellfish poisoning biotoxin levels have recently increased in molluscan shellfish in Bellingham and Chuckanut Bays. As a result, the Washington State Department of Health has announced that Bellingham Bay and Chuckanut Bay are now closed to the harvest of all species of molluscan shellfish.

Biotoxin levels can change rapidly, so shellfish harvesters are advised to always check for current shellfish closures on the Washington Shellfish Safety Map (doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety) or to call the DOH Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632 before harvesting shellfish anywhere in Washington State.

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

Algae that contain marine biotoxins cannot be seen and must be detected by laboratory testing. The Whatcom County Health Department routinely collects shellfish samples to monitor local biotoxin levels in coordination with the Washington State Department of Health. We will notify the public when there is a change in biotoxin levels that may affect public health.

Molluscan shellfish include clams, mussels, oysters and scallops. During a biotoxin event, mussels and varnish clams usually contain the highest toxin concentration. Paralytic shellfish poisoning biotoxin and other 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.

More information about safely harvesting shellfish is available from the Washington State Department of Health at www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Shellfish/RecreationalShellfish.

###

