

DANGER 

TOXIC SHELLFISH

DO NOT EAT clams, oysters, mussels, or scallops.

Shellfish in this area are unsafe to eat.

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Paralytic Shellfish Poison Events in the South Sound Fact Sheet



Rising Paralytic Shellfish Poison Levels Prompt Beach Closures in Pierce County

On September 21, 2023, the [Washington State Department of Health](#) issued the first beach closure in Pierce County due to high levels of Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP). PSP, a toxin produced by certain algae, can be harmful when consumed. Beach closures due to this toxin have been reported throughout the Puget Sound since mid-August, and this year's occurrence has been particularly severe. Communities for a Healthy Bay (CHB) has been diligently tracking the spread of PSP and urges the public to understand the associated risks and reasons behind these closures.

Paralytic Shellfish Poison Explained

[Paralytic Shellfish Poison](#) is a biotoxin naturally produced by certain species of algae. Shellfish and other filter feeders can accumulate this toxin when they consume the algae. Subsequently, animals that feed on these shellfish, such as crabs, can also become toxic. The levels of this toxin can fluctuate rapidly, making it crucial to stay informed with the most current and up-to-date information.

Why is it Dangerous?

Cooking shellfish does not remove or neutralize PSP. Moreover, there is no antidote for severe poisoning, so victims have to wait for toxins to eliminate naturally from their bodies. Eating contaminated shellfish can affect the central nervous system, causing temporary paralysis and even death. In severe cases where chest paralysis occurs, life support systems like respirators and oxygen must be used to keep victims alive. Tragically, there are cases of death from PSP occurring in less than 30 minutes. It is important to note that symptoms of PSP can occur within minutes or even up to two hours after consumption. These symptoms include:

- ▶ Tingling of lips, tongue, fingers and toes
- ▶ Loss of limb control
- ▶ Sense of floating
- ▶ Nausea
- ▶ Difficulty breathing

Shellfish Safety

- ✔ Check the Washington Department of Health's [Shellfish Safety Map](#) and [List of Beach Closures by County](#) **immediately before** harvesting shellfish. Toxin levels can change quickly and there can be several beach closures throughout the day when there is frequent testing.
- ✔ Don't consider a beach or harvesting area safe just because you don't see a *Toxic Shellfish Warning Sign*. Signs might be missing or damaged. Always try to verify the current status online.
- ✔ Contact the [Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department](#) at (253) 649-1420 ext. 7 for up-to-date information on local beach closures due to pollution or toxins.
- ✔ Review the [Shellfish Harvest Planner](#) to plan safer fishing trips.
- ✔ Educate others – share this Fact Sheet or [Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning Handout](#) with your community and other fishers to make sure they understand the risks and strategies for safe fishing.

If you notice symptoms of poisoning, call 911 or seek emergency medical attention immediately.