



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DEC warns of PSP in shellfish

February 9, 2007--Shellfish gatherers should be cautious of the dangers of Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) from clams and mussels gathered on beaches across Alaska. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is warning sport harvesters not to eat shellfish from beaches that DEC has not classified as safe. A recent PSP incident in which a person became ill from eating butter clams in the Juneau area of Southeast Alaska prompted this warning to sport harvesters.

The risks of PSP from clams and mussels from unclassified beaches are real. PSP occurs widely in Alaska and strikes people nearly every year. The only safe shellfish collection areas are those that DEC classifies for commercial harvest, where clams, mussels, and other shellfish are tested on a regular basis.

The DEC warning does not apply to commercially-grown and harvested clams, mussels, crab, shrimp or other shellfish available in grocery stores and restaurants. These shellfish are tested regularly before marketing. Buying shellfish from retail outlets is safest, since supplies come from tested beaches.

Classified safe beaches include: Halibut Cove Lagoon, Jakolof Bay, Kasitsna Bay (McDonald Spit), Tutka Bay, Chugachik Island, Sadie Cove, Polly Creek and Crescent River, all located in the Cook Inlet and Kachemak Bay area.

Butter clams are notorious for high levels of PSP as they can retain the toxin for several years. The area known as Kachemak Bay East, which extends east-southeast of a line from Barbara Point to the mouth of Martin River, is closed to all commercial harvest of butter clams due to unacceptable PSP levels. All harvesters are cautioned not to mistake small butter clams for littlenecks clams. Butter clams can be identified

by the prominent concentric growth rings while littlenecks have circular rings and radiating ridges that criss-cross on the shell.

PSP comes from algae, a food source for filter-feeding shellfish like clams and mussels. The shellfish store the toxin from the algae in their tissues. The toxin can be present even when there is no visible discoloration in the water, or so-called red tides in the ocean water, and there is no discoloration of the shellfish.

PSP toxin has also been found in crab viscera; however, the rest of the crab is safe. DEC cautions eating crab viscera from some species in certain areas of the state. To find out what locations are unsafe for crab viscera, contact George Scanlan at (907) 269-7638.

Symptoms of PSP may appear in less than an hour after ingestion. Initial symptoms are a tingling or numbness in the lips and tongue, often followed by tingling and numbness in the fingertips and toes. These symptoms may progress to loss of muscle coordination, dizziness, weakness, drowsiness and incoherence. Vomiting should be induced at the first sign of the onset of symptoms, and medical attention should be sought immediately.

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