



Elevated levels of toxin associated with amnesic shellfish poisoning present in West Coast and Haida Gwaii shellfish

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The First Nations Health Authority, Island Health and Northern Health are reminding First Nations harvesters not to harvest or eat clams, oysters, scallops, mussels, cockles, geoducks, gooseneck barnacles, whelks, periwinkles or the innards of lobster and crab taken from areas closed for shellfish harvesting (see attached maps). Elevated levels of domoic acid, the toxin associated with amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP), have been detected in some of these species.

Symptoms of ASP at lower levels include diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and cramps. At higher concentrations poisoning can include headache, disorientation, confusion and memory loss.

There have been no reported illnesses associated with this event.

Two important things to know about ASP:

1. Cooking does not render the shellfish safe
2. The best way to keep your family safe is not to harvest shellfish from closure areas

The Canada Food Inspection Agency (CIFA) is working with commercial fisherman in the area to ensure that impacted shellfish are not distributed into the human food supply. Shellfish that are harvested for sale are monitored and tested by the CIFA and shellfish from an approved source are considered safe for consumption in moderate amounts.

Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) is continuing to collect a variety of molluscan bivalve shellfish, and crab samples from the area to monitor the level of the toxin.

- Closure information can be found at <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/contamination/biotox/index-eng.html>
- Information on marine toxics can be found at <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthtopics/content.asp?hwid=ug2961>

Since late May there has been a presence of the toxin in shellfish harvest areas on the West Coast of Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii. Typically present in California, heightened toxin levels in BC are being attributed to warming ocean waters.

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Figure 1: Map of Impacted Communities - West Coast Vancouver Island



Figure 2: Map of Impacted Communities – Haida Gwaii

