



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 28, 2009
PH09-99

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CDPH LIFTS SPORT-HARVESTED MUSSELS QUARANTINE

SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) announced today that the statewide annual quarantine on mussels taken by sport harvesters from California's ocean waters ends at midnight on Saturday, October 31 for all counties except Del Norte, Humboldt, and San Luis Obispo. Aside for these three counties, samplings of mussels show no detectable levels of dangerous toxins and human consumption of shellfish is now considered safe.

The annual quarantine is issued for the entire California coastline, usually from May 1 through October 31. The quarantine applies only to sport-harvested mussels. Commercially harvested shellfish are not included in the quarantine as other steps are taken to assure oysters, clams and mussels entering the marketplace are free of toxins.

Paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) is a form of nervous system poisoning. Concentrated levels of the PSP toxins can develop in mussels and other bivalve shellfish when they feed on certain naturally occurring marine plankton.

A second form of poisoning, Domoic Acid Poisoning (DAP) -- sometimes referred to as Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning (ASP) -- has been linked to natural food sources for filter-feeding animals like bivalve shellfish. No known cases of human ASP have occurred in California this season. Domoic acid has been linked to several poisonings of marine mammals along the Pacific Coast and may have caused several mild cases of human poisoning in the state of Washington.

CDPH's shellfish sampling and testing programs for PSP and ASP issue warnings or quarantines when needed. Local health departments, various state and federal agencies and others participate in the monitoring program.

Consumers can receive updated information about shellfish poisoning by calling the "Shellfish Information Line" at (800) 553-4133.

www.cdph.ca.gov

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MARK B HORTON, MD, MSPH
Director

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
California Department of Public Health



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
Governor

October 28, 2009

TO: LOCAL HEALTH OFFICERS
LOCAL DISEASE CONTROL OFFICERS
DIRECTORS OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

SUBJECT: ANNUAL MUSSEL QUARANTINE ENDS AT MIDNIGHT ON
OCTOBER 31, 2009 EXCEPT DEL NORTE, HUMBOLDT AND SAN LUIS
OBISPO COUNTIES

We thank you for your assistance and cooperation in the prevention of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) in California. Mark B Horton, MD, MSPH, Director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has announced that the annual quarantine for sport-harvested mussels will end at midnight on October 31, 2009, for all coastal counties except Del Norte, Humboldt, and San Luis Obispo. Extensive sampling of mussels confirmed that shellfish-borne PSP toxins and domoic acid are at safe or undetectable levels in all counties except Del Norte, Humboldt, and San Luis Obispo. CDPH continues to detect elevated levels of toxins in shellfish samples from these three counties.

Press Release

CDPH will issue a press release announcing the end of the annual mussel quarantine to all major news services in California. A copy of the CDPH release is included with this package. Your assistance is requested to ensure this announcement receives coverage in your area. The background information on biotoxins provided at the start of the quarantine period is available on the CDPH web site:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/environhealth/water/Pages/Shellfish.aspx>

Placards

Quarantine placards (or the quarantine notice itself) should remain in place for the three counties affected by the extended quarantine but can be removed from display at all stores, bait shops, dive shops, public parks and access points, and similar locations along the coast for all other counties.

Local Health Officers
Local Disease Control Officers
Directors of Environmental Health
Page 2
October 28, 2009

Shellfish Toxins Monitoring Program

We thank all the coastal county health departments that participated in the shellfish biotoxin monitoring program during the 2008-09 year. We ask that all coastal county health departments participate during the 2009-10 year. This voluntary effort is particularly important prior to and during the annual quarantine months of May through October. This time period has been especially critical the past several years, as we have frequently experienced record levels of domoic acid in shellfish in the early spring. Biotoxin activity was above average for the PSP toxins in 2009. The occurrence of these toxins over a large part of the California coast represents a significant increase from past years and reinforces the need for frequent sampling throughout the year to ensure early detection of a toxic bloom.

In the last major PSP outbreak in July 1980, the sudden appearance of illnesses came without warning because few coastal shellfish samples had been submitted for analysis. Since 1980, certified commercial shellfish harvesters have been required to submit weekly samples to CDPH for analysis during all harvesting periods. If illness and deaths from PSP are to be prevented, it is essential to have periodic sampling data from numerous locations, especially along the open coast, where mussels may commonly be harvested despite quarantine warnings. Coastal mussel samples also are essential because they provide early warning information needed to keep clam and cockle beds open during the quarantine period. If an adequate coastal monitoring program is not maintained, it may be necessary to quarantine all species of sport-harvested bivalve molluscs, not just mussels, during the May through October period or longer.

Coastal county health authorities are also invited to participate in a unique and valuable volunteer-based phytoplankton monitoring program now being conducted by the CDPH Environmental Management Branch (EMB). Early detection of toxin-producing phytoplankton can alert CDPH to these potentially dangerous toxic blooms before they impact shellfish resources. This early detection can allow more efficient use of state and local resources to assess the potential threat to public health. This program provides the basic equipment and training necessary to all qualified participants.

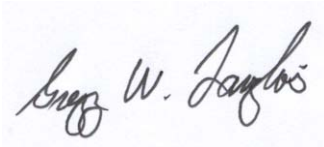
All coastal county health departments and other sampling program participants receive a monthly newsletter and an annual summary of all shellfish testing results for the entire coast of California.

Shellfish Information Line

CDPH's toll-free Shellfish Information Line, at 1-800-553-4133, contains recorded updates on shellfish biotoxin quarantines and health advisories.

Local Health Officers
Local Disease Control Officers
Directors of Environmental Health
Page 3
October 28, 2009

If you have questions about any of these matters, please feel free to call Gregg W. Langlois, coordinator of the EMB Shellfish Protection and Biotoxin Monitoring Program, at (510) 412-4635, or Dr. Duc Vugia, Chief of the Infectious Disease Branch, at (510) 620-3434.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregg W. Langlois". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the word "for".

for

Glenn Takeoka, Chief
Environmental Management Branch

Enclosure