





*Sometimes shellfish contain a toxin that causes Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP). These toxic conditions have also been referred to as Red Tide. By observing beach closures and checking with the Health Department, at (253) 798-6470 extension 7, concerning possible contamination, you can avoid this problem.*





### **Safety Precautions**

Please remember you can't rely on the color of the water to indicate the presence of PSP since shellfish may be unsafe even if there is no discoloration of the water.




### **You can't tell if shellfish are toxic**

-  By examining them, since poisonous shellfish do not look, taste, or smell any different from nontoxic ones.
-  By cooking them with a clove of garlic or a silver spoon to see if the garlic or spoon turns black.
-  By using a field or home testing kit since no reliable kit has yet been developed.
-  By using a "sample and see" method since a single shellfish will occasionally contain enough poison to kill an adult, and even if a single one does not cause PSP symptoms, a whole meal could contain a potentially lethal dose.

### **You can't be sure of getting rid of enough of the poison by any method tried so far.**

-  Boiling does not destroy the toxin.
-  Discarding the water the shellfish are cooked in removes only a small part of the poison.
-  Cutting off and discarding the black tip of butter clam necks removes much of the toxin, but the rest of the clam could still contain hazardous amounts of the toxin.
-  Soaking the live shellfish in water from a PSP-free area to purge them is unreliable.

### **Please**

-  Do remember that the PSP program carried on by the state and counties offers the best information about areas where shellfish should not be harvested because of PSP.
-  Do call the PSP hotline before gathering shellfish, 1-800-562-5632.
-  Do observe all beach closures.

From *Gathering Safe Shellfish in Washington: Avoiding Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning*, Louisa Nishitani, Kenneth K. Chew, and Teri L. King. The rest of the article is also available, and gives more detailed information about PSP in Washington, symptoms, and treatment.