



DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Promoting and protecting health, well-being, self-sufficiency, and safety of all in Marin County.



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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

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Shellfish poisoning toxins found in recreationally harvested shellfish in Marin County

Dear Colleagues:

This advisory provides information about paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP), disease recognition, screening and testing, reporting procedures, and resources for Marin County clinicians.

Situation Update

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is advising consumers not to eat recreationally harvested mussels, clams, oysters or whole scallops from Marin County. These bivalve shellfish are filter feeders and accumulate toxins produced by microscopic algae.

Dangerous levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) toxins have been detected in mussels harvested in Marin County. The naturally occurring PSP toxins can cause illness or death in humans. Cooking does not destroy the toxin. This warning does not apply to commercially sold clams, mussels, scallops or oysters from approved sources.

There have been 542 reported illnesses and 39 deaths attributed to PSP in California over the past 90 years, according to state statistics. The PSP levels recorded this week are the highest levels detected in Marin in 20 years, and are potentially lethal.

Actions requested of providers

- **Advise patients** not to eat recreationally harvested mussels, clams, oysters and whole scallops from Marin County.
- **Review the clinical presentation** of PSP and ask patients who present with signs or symptoms consistent with PSP if they have harvested or eaten recreationally harvested mussels, clams, or whole scallops.
- **Provide supportive and symptom-driven treatment** for patients with suspected PSP.
- **Report suspected PSP** to [Marin County's Communicable Disease Prevention and Control \(CDPC\) unit.](#)

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning Clinical Presentation

PSP toxins affect the central nervous system, producing a tingling around the mouth and fingertips within a few minutes to a few hours after eating toxic shellfish. Other symptoms include a sensation of floating, headache, ataxia, muscle weakness, paralysis, and cranial nerve dysfunction. In severe poisonings, complete muscular paralysis and death from asphyxiation can occur. Fatalities are usually within the first 12 hours of symptom onset and are caused by unsupported respiratory failure. PSP usually lasts 3 days, but muscle weakness may persist for weeks.

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning Diagnosis and Treatment

Direct human serum assays for shellfish toxins are not yet available to clinicians.

Therapy for all shellfish poisonings is supportive and symptom-driven. Gastrointestinal decontamination with activated charcoal is recommended for patients who present within 4 hours of ingestion. Close monitoring for at least 24 hours and aggressive airway management at any sign of respiratory compromise should prevent severe morbidity and mortality.

Additional Resources

You can get the most current information on shellfish advisories and quarantines by calling CDPH's toll-free Shellfish Information Line at (800) 553-4133. For additional information, please visit the [CDPH Marine Biotoxin Monitoring Web](#) page.

Sincerely,

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