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Most of Island County remains closed to butter and varnish clam harvesting

OLYMPIA – More than a dozen beaches remain closed across Island County to butter clam and varnish clam harvesting after high levels of [marine biotoxins](#) were found in clam samples. The looming closure follows the [paralytic shellfish poison](#) bloom that occurred in 2021. Both clam species can retain toxins caused by PSP – also known as ‘red tide’ – for up to a year or more.

The following areas in Island County remain closed to butter and varnish clam harvesting:

- Port Susan
- West Whidbey Island
- Saratoga Passage
- Possession Sound, including Utsalady Bay
- Penn Cove
- Holmes Harbor

It’s important to know an area can be closed to butter and varnish clam harvest but open for other marine species. While crabs and shrimp are not included in the closure, crabs should be cleaned before cooking and the crab butter found under the shell should be removed.

“We are optimistic biotoxin-related harvest restrictions can be removed from some beaches in the coming months,” said Tracie S. Barry, Marine Biotoxin Specialist, Washington State Department of Health. “However, we can’t rush nature. Please be patient and do not put your life at risk by harvesting shellfish in an area closed for biotoxins.”

Symptoms of PSP can appear within minutes or hours. It can start with tingling lips and tongue, moving to the hands and feet, followed by difficulty breathing and potentially death. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should contact a health care provider or call 911.

Island County clam harvest closures

May 1, 2023

Page 2

Marine biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking or freezing. Commercially harvested shellfish sold in stores and restaurants are tested for toxins prior to distribution and are safe to eat.

Butter and varnish clam closure signs are posted at public beaches throughout Island County. Current biotoxin closures are listed on the [Washington Shellfish Safety Map](#). For a recorded list of areas closed for biotoxins, call the biotoxin/red tide hotline at 1-800-562-5632. To learn more about marine biotoxins and marine biotoxin illnesses, visit the [marine biotoxins section of DOH's website](#).

The [DOH website](#) is your source for a healthy dose of information. [Find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#). Sign up for the DOH blog, [Public Health Connection](#).

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