



SHELLFISH POISONING

Fact Sheet

Shellfish are nutritious foods that are an important part of many First Nations' peoples' diets. However, shellfish contain marine toxins (poisonous substances) which can cause shellfish poisoning. These toxins are found naturally in some marine algae and accumulate in some types of shellfish like clams, mussels, scallops and oysters. Humans can then get shellfish poisoning from eating those types of shellfish.

TYPES OF SHELLFISH POISONINGS

- Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP)
- Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning (ASP)
- Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP)
- Neurotoxic Shellfish Poisoning (NSP)

HOW TO GET SHELLFISH POISONING FROM EATING:

- ❖ Bivalve (two-part hinged shell) shellfish (molluscs) such as clams, mussels, scallops, oysters and cockles.
- ❖ Non-bivalve shellfish such as whelks
- ❖ Crustaceans such as crabs and lobsters.

IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT:

- ❖ Contaminated shellfish usually looks, smells, and tastes normal.
- ❖ Cooking at high temperatures does not kill the toxins so you can still get sick.

Most cases of shellfish poisoning seems to occur with recreational shellfish harvesting from closed areas on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and along the St-Lawrence River in the summer months.

	PARALYTIC SHELLFISH POISONING	AMNESIC SHELLFISH POISONING	DIARRHETIC SHELLFISH POISONING	NEUROTOXIC SHELLFISH POISONING
SYMPTOMS BEGIN WHEN	A few minutes up to 10 hours	30 minutes up to 6 hours	30 minutes up to 2-3 hours	A few minutes to a few hours
(These are some of the common symptoms but everyone can react somewhat differently so if you are unsure, see your health centre ASAP)	Gastrointestinal May have nausea and vomiting Neurological Tingling; Burning; Numbness; Drowsiness, Incoherent speech; Prickly sensation in the arms and legs; Stiffness and non-co-ordination of limbs; Weakness and a rapid pulse; Respiratory difficulty; Salivation; Temporary blindness	Gastrointestinal Nausea; Vomiting; Diarrhea; Abdominal pain Neurological Muscle weakness; Confusion; Memory loss; Disorientation; Seizure; Coma	Gastrointestinal Nausea; Vomiting; Diarrhea; Abdominal pain; Chills; Headache; Fever Neurological None	Gastrointestinal Diarrhea; Vomiting Neurological: Tingling and numbness of lips, tongue, and throat; Muscular aches; Dizziness; Reversal of the sensations of hot and cold
RECOVERY	Usually is complete with no lasting side effects when support is given within 12 hours of exposure. In extreme cases it can be fatal.	Symptoms usually disappear completely within a few days unless someone is not healthy or if elderly. In extreme cases it can be fatal.	Recovery is complete, usually after 2-3 days. It is generally not life-threatening.	Recovery is complete with few after effects. No fatalities have been reported.

Symptoms often depend on the amount of toxins present and on how much we consumed.



TREATMENTS

If you think you may have symptoms of any shellfish poisoning, even if just minor, get medical attention as soon as possible. Most of the treatments are to help reduce the symptoms because there are few specific treatments. If you suspect shellfish poisoning, it may help to induce vomiting by sticking a finger down your throat, by drinking warm salt water or taking syrup of Ipecac to push out as much shellfish as possible from the stomach. It is still very important that you get medical attention as soon as possible.

PREVENTION

- ❖ Only eat shellfish from open harvest areas. If you are unsure, it is your responsibility to call your local Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (listed in the local telephone directory) to find out which areas are open. When an area is officially closed, it is illegal to harvest shellfish there unless you have a special licence.
- ❖ The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) regularly analyzes shellfish samples and if there is a problem, they let the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) know so that they can close down the affected area.
- ❖ Refrigerate or freeze shellfish until eaten.

If you see any of the following, contact your nearest Department of Fisheries and Oceans (listed in the local telephone directory) or your health centre to let them know as these could all be signs that toxins may be present:

- ❖ Discolored ocean, bay or estuary waters;
- ❖ Unusual behavior or illness displayed by a group of fish, birds, or mammals;
- ❖ An extensive bird, mammal, or fish kill.

OTHER FACTS

- ❖ Chewing on a small piece of shellfish is not a way to test if the shellfish is okay because the effects in the mouth and from the stomach are not the same.
- ❖ Cleaning out the intestines of the shellfish can sometimes make it safer to eat but not always because if the shellfish has been contaminated for a while, the toxins spread from the intestines to the rest of the tissues.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Call us Toll-Free at 1-866-960-5223 for more environmental health resources.

The information given has been adapted from the following sites and documents:

- [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#)
- [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#)
- [Centre for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Health Canada](#)
- [Marine Advisory Program - Alaska](#)

