

William J. Streur
Commissioner
P.O. Box 110601
Juneau, AK 99811-0601
www.hss.state.ak.us



Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 11, 2011

Contact: Greg Wilkinson, (907) 269-7285, Cell (907) 382-7032
gregory.wilkinson@alaska.gov
Ann Potempa, (907) 269-7957, Cell (907) 230-4001
ann.potempa@alaska.gov

State warns about shellfish poisoning

The only safe shellfish are the ones you buy in the store

ANCHORAGE — The Department of Health and Social Services is reminding residents and visitors that paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) is an ever-present possibility in Alaska. PSP is a serious illness caused by eating shellfish contaminated with a toxic algae.

All locally harvested shellfish — including clams, mussels, oysters, geoducks and scallops — can contain paralytic shellfish poison. Crabmeat is not known to contain the PSP toxin, but the guts can contain unsafe levels and should be discarded. PSP cannot be cooked or cleaned out of shellfish. Commercially grown shellfish is tested and considered safe.

Early symptoms often include tingling of the lips and tongue, and may begin within minutes of eating poisonous shellfish, or may take an hour or two to develop. Symptoms may progress to tingling of fingers and toes and then loss of control of arms and legs, followed by difficulty in breathing. Death can result in as little as two hours.

Alaska does not have a PSP testing program for recreational or subsistence harvested shellfish and does not certify beaches as PSP-free. Shellfish harvested anywhere can potentially have dangerous levels of PSP.

Paralytic shellfish poisoning is considered a public health emergency. Suspected cases must be reported immediately to the Section of Epidemiology by health care providers at 907-269-8000 during work hours or 800-478-0084 after hours.

For more information on PSP go to:

http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/marine_toxins/
<http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/dod/psp/default.htm>

###

DHSS is now on Twitter. Follow health updates at www.twitter.com/Alaska_DHSS.