



SCOTT W. LINDQUIST, MD, MPH, DIRECTOR  
345 6<sup>TH</sup> STREET, SUITE 300  
BREMERTON, WA 98337-1866  
(360) 337-5235

# News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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CONTACT: Shawn Ultican  
(360) 337-5622

## **“Cook All Shellfish” Advisory Expanded to Entire County**

*Sixty People Statewide Have Been Sickened From Eating Raw Oysters*

**BREMERTON** – The Washington State Department of Health has reported that, as of yesterday, 60 people statewide have gotten sick from eating raw or undercooked oysters, with most cases reported this month. These illnesses were caused by a bacterium called *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, which is naturally present in different areas of Puget Sound. Due to the increasing number of illnesses, the Health District today issued a countywide advisory to cook all shellfish.

“Eating raw shellfish any time of year exposes people to a greater risk of getting sick,” said Dr. Scott Lindquist, Health Officer for Kitsap County. “With the current illness outbreak, the risk is even higher. The good news is that people can protect themselves by just cooking their shellfish.”

Symptoms of vibriosis include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, headache, fever, and chills. The symptoms usually appear about 12 hours after eating infected shellfish but can begin within two hours or as late as 48 hours after consumption. The illness usually lasts for two to seven days. Symptoms are typically mild to moderate but can be life threatening to people with immune dysfunction or chronic liver disease.

Thorough cooking will kill the bacteria and leave the shellfish safe to eat. Food safety specialists recommend that oyster meat be cooked to an internal temperature of 145° F. Some commercial growers may still harvest oysters from these areas, but those oysters can only be sold after they are shucked, packed and labeled, “for cooking only.”

There are also closures in place on the east side of Kitsap County because of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP), also known as ‘red tide’. The PSP closures include all species of clams, oysters,

## **MORE “Cook All Shellfish” Advisory Expanded to Entire County – Page 2**

and mussels. Please note, the PSP toxin is NOT DESTROYED BY COOKING, freezing or any other method of preparation.

These advisories affect recreational harvesting on both public and private beaches. Warning signs have been posted at public beaches to alert people about these health advisories.

For current shellfish closures within Kitsap County, call our hotline number: 1-800-2BE-WELL or visit us online at [www.kitsapcountyhealth.com](http://www.kitsapcountyhealth.com). For closures in other areas of Washington, call the Washington State Department of Health’s Red Tide Hotline at 1-800-562-5632, or visit them online at [www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm).

*This notice supersedes previous PSP notices.*

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# News Release

For immediate release: July 14, 2006

(06-105)

**Contacts:** Richard Lillie, Vibrio Coordinator  
Jeff Smith, Communications Office

360-236-3313  
360-236-4072

## **Bacterial contamination found in oysters can lead to illness**

*Thorough cooking will kill bacteria and leave shellfish safe to eat*

**OLYMPIA** — A sporadic bacterial outbreak in Puget Sound has sickened several people across the state.

The bacteria, *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, are found primarily in oysters but can infect other shellfish as well. The Washington State Department of Health tests samples for the bacteria each year from May to October. The samples show sporadic bacterial contamination in shellfish throughout South Puget Sound, Hood Canal and Willapa Bay.

Vibrio causes a variety of symptoms including diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, headache, fever, and chills. The symptoms usually appear about 12 hours after eating infected shellfish but can occur anywhere from 2 to 48 hours after consumption. The illness is usually mild to moderate and lasts for 2 to 7 days.

Thorough cooking will kill the bacteria and leave the shellfish safe to eat. The risk comes from eating raw shellfish, especially oysters.

“During warm weather months the risk of infection by *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* is increased and shellfish should be thoroughly cooked to prevent illness,” said Richard Lillie, Vibrio Coordinator for the Office of Food Safety and Shellfish. “This also includes shellfish purchased at the supermarket.”

The agency will continue to monitor bacteria levels in oysters throughout the warm weather months.

Vibrio parahaemolyticus

July 14, 2006

Page 2

“While many people think it’s great to slurp a fresh oyster, they can expose themselves to a variety of health risks,” Lillie said. “Shellfish currently on the market should be safe to eat, provided that they have been kept refrigerated or iced after purchase and are thoroughly cooked to 145° F,” Lillie said.

The general public should look at notification of closure for marinas and recreational beaches by checking the department’s [Biotoxin Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm) (http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm) or the biotoxin hotline at 1-800-562-5632. Harvesters should also look for and obey warning signs that have been posted at marinas and recreational beaches.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for a healthy dose of information.

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# News Release

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**For immediate release:** July 20, 2006

(06-112)

Contacts:     Donn Moyer, Communications Office  
                  Jeff Smith, Communications Office

360-236-4076  
360-236-4072

## **Bacterial contamination of Washington oysters causes dozens of illnesses**

*Thorough cooking is best prevention*

**OLYMPIA** — Since July 10 nearly four dozen Washington residents have become ill after eating raw oysters contaminated with naturally occurring bacteria. *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* is a bacteria naturally found in seawater. Two people were hospitalized as a result of their illness, but there have been no deaths. As a result of these illnesses, three growing areas in Hood Canal as well as Totten and Eld inlets in South Puget Sound have been closed to commercial harvest of oysters for raw consumption.

Almost all of these cases are associated with the consumption of commercial and recreationally harvested oysters from Washington. The Department of Health has also received reports from several other states and provinces regarding infections that appear to be associated with consumption of shellfish harvested in the Pacific Northwest. Growers have the option of having product shucked and labeled, “for cooking only.”

The agency is investigating the outbreak, along with other local, state and provincial health agencies where similar illnesses have been reported. High levels of this kind of bacteria can grow in saltwater areas during the summer months and infection with the bacteria usually occurs after eating raw or undercooked shellfish contaminated with the bacteria.

Nancy Napolilli, director of the department’s Office of Food Safety and Shellfish recommends restaurants and consumers thoroughly cook all shellfish prior to service or consumption. Those with chronic liver disease or immune dysfunction should avoid consuming raw shellfish. This

Oyster illness

July 20, 2006

Page 2

includes shellfish purchased in supermarkets and farmers markets as well as any that are recreationally harvested. Shellfish should be cooked to an internal temperature of 145° F.

All licensed shellfish growers in the affected areas have been contacted; the restaurant and grocery associations in the state have also been notified. Recreational harvesters should be aware of the situation. Notification of closure for marinas and recreational beaches can be found on the agency's [Biotoxin Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm>) or the biotoxin hotline at 1-800-562-5632. Harvesters should also look for and obey warning signs that have been posted at marinas and recreational beaches.

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