

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP)

Over Memorial Day weekend, Oregon Health Authority learned of several people with paralytic shellfish poisoning after eating self-harvested shellfish from the northern Oregon coast.

What is PSP?

Paralytic shellfish poisoning, or PSP, is caused by a toxin called saxitoxin. It is not an infection. Saxitoxins are made by tiny plants in the ocean (phytoplankton) that build up inside shellfish (like clams & mussels) and poison humans who eat them.

Who is at risk?

Anyone who eats shellfish containing this toxin can become sick or even die in rare cases. If you have eaten shellfish that might contain the toxin, you don't need to do anything unless you become ill (see below).

How do I know if I have PSP?

Within minutes to hours of eating contaminated shellfish, you might start to feel ill. Illness usually resolves completely within a few hours to days after eating shellfish, and can include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Headache
- Numbness in your mouth
- Tingling in your hands or feet

Seek medical help **immediately** if you have any of the following severe symptoms:

- Muscle weakness
- Dizziness or a feeling of tilting or spinning
- Lightheadedness or a floating sensation
- Difficulty speaking
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty breathing

In severe cases, PSP could result in respiratory arrest and death if left untreated.

I think I have PSP. Now what?

1. **If your symptoms are severe, seek medical attention immediately.**
2. If your illness is mild or you feel better, report your illness to the Oregon Poison Center by calling 800-222-1222 or fill out [this online survey](#) developed by Oregon Health Authority.
3. Freeze and save any leftover shellfish to submit to your [local public health authority](#) for testing.

How can I prevent PSP?

PSP cannot be spread from person to person. PSP occurs after eating shellfish containing the toxin. **Cooking or freezing does not inactivate the toxin.**

Shellfish consumed at restaurants or purchased in grocery stores have not been linked to this outbreak of PSP.

Shellfish should only be eaten from safe sources, either commercial products or from beaches open to harvest. Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) tests shellfish along the Oregon coast regularly. Check for current shellfish safety closures at the [ODA website](#) or call the shellfish harvest hotline, 800-448-2474.

Where can I learn more?

- [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Shellfish & Biotoxins](#)
- [Washington Department of Health, Shellfish & Biotoxins](#)
- [CDC Harmful Algal Blooms](#)