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California Department of Public Health



GAVIN NEWSOM
Governor

DATE: April 29, 2020

TO: Local Health Officers
Local Disease Control Officers
Directors of Environmental Health

FROM: Environmental Management Branch and
Infectious Diseases Branch

SUBJECT: ANNUAL MUSSEL QUARANTINE

The Quarantine Order

Enclosed are copies of the 2020 annual mussel quarantine order, in both English and Spanish, issued by Dr. Sonia Angell, Director and State Health Officer of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). The annual mussel quarantine is for the prevention of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) and domoic acid poisoning and is in effect from May 1 through October 31. This quarantine applies to all species of mussels harvested by the public anywhere on the California coast, including all bays and estuaries. Also enclosed is a document containing a summary of the 2019 monitoring results and background information on the PSP toxins and domoic acid.

Press Releases

CDPH will issue a press release announcing the annual mussel quarantine to all major news services in California (see enclosed). Securing media coverage in all counties is important since PSP outbreaks in the past have involved residents of inland counties as well as those along the coast. Your assistance is requested to ensure that this announcement receives coverage in your area.

Placards

Quarantine placards (or the quarantine notice itself) should be placed in conspicuous locations near popular mussel and clam beds within your jurisdiction to warn the public of the PSP hazard. They also should be provided for display at stores, bait shops, dive shops, public parks and access points, and similar locations along the coast.

CDPH Preharvest Shellfish Unit, EMB
850 Marina Bay Pkwy MS G165 • Richmond, CA 94804
(510) 412-4635 • (510) 412-4637 FAX



Reporting of Shellfish Poisoning Illness

PSP and poisoning due to any other marine biotoxins (such as domoic acid) are immediately reportable to the local health authority (Title 17, California Code of Regulations, Sections 2500); this includes suspected cases. Local health departments should interview patients regarding shellfish exposure and report these cases promptly to the Infectious Diseases Branch at (510) 620-3434.

Shellfish Toxins Monitoring Program

All coastal county health departments are requested to participate in the shellfish biotoxin monitoring program. In the last major PSP outbreak in 1980, the sudden appearance of illnesses in July came without warning because few coastal shellfish samples had been submitted for analysis. Since 1980, certified commercial shellfish harvesters have been required to submit weekly samples to CDPH for analysis during all harvesting periods.

If illness and deaths from PSP are to be prevented, it is essential to have periodic sampling data from other locations, especially along the open coast, where mussels may commonly be harvested despite quarantine warnings. Coastal mussel samples also are essential because they provide early warning information needed to keep clam and cockle beds open during the quarantine period. If an adequate coastal monitoring program is not maintained, it may be necessary to quarantine all species of sport harvested bivalve mollusks, not just mussels, during the May through October period or longer.

Coastal county health authorities also are invited to participate in a unique volunteer based phytoplankton monitoring program now being conducted by EMB. Early detection of toxin-producing phytoplankton can alert CDPH to potentially dangerous toxic blooms before shellfish resources are impacted.

How to Sample and Submit Shellfish Specimens for Testing

Each coastal county health department is requested to submit shellfish samples (mussels from the outer coast are preferred) from at least two representative sites, twice per month through October, and once per month during the remaining months, as weather and tidal conditions permit. Please note that at least 200 grams of shellfish meat (approximately one cup) are requested. Shipping containers and detailed instructions can be obtained by contacting EMB at (510) 412-4635. You will be notified promptly of laboratory test results if any sample equals or exceeds the federally established "alert" level of 80 micrograms of PSP toxins per 100 grams of shellfish meat or 20 parts per million (ppm) for domoic acid. In addition, all coastal county health departments and other sampling program participants receive monthly and annual reports summarizing shellfish testing results for the entire coast of California.

Local Health Officers
Local Disease Control Officers
Directors of Environmental Health
Page 3 of 3

Shellfish Information Line

The CDPH Biotxin Information Line, with recorded updates on shellfish biotoxins and quarantines, has a toll-free telephone number at 1-800-553-4133.

CDPH has developed a “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ) for the annual mussel quarantine that can be found online at:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DRSEM/Pages/EMB/Shellfish/Annual-Mussel-Quarantine.aspx>

Additional information about the CDPH Biotxin Monitoring Program can be found online at:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DRSEM/Pages/EMB/Shellfish/Marine-Biotxin-Monitoring-Program.aspx>

If you have questions about any of these matters, please feel free to call Vanessa Zubkousky-White, coordinator of the EMB Biotxin Monitoring Program at (510) 412-4635, or the Infectious Disease Branch at (510) 620-3434.

Vanessa Zubkousky-White
Senior Environmental Scientist

Enclosures