



**STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
P. O. BOX 3378  
HONOLULU, HI 96801-3378**

June 7, 2024

**MEDICAL ADVISORY: PARALYTIC SHELLFISH POISONING FROM SHELLFISH  
IMPORTED FROM WASHINGTON AND OREGON**

- Shellfish harvested from Washington and Oregon in May 2024 have been found to be contaminated with saxitoxin, the neurotoxin that causes Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP).
- The contaminated shellfish has been distributed to Hawaii. Residents or visitors who eat the contaminated shellfish are at risk of developing PSP.
- Symptoms of PSP include rapid-onset paresthesias of the tongue, lips, face, torso, arms and legs as well as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Severe cases can lead to ataxia, dysphagia, flaccid paralysis and respiratory failure.
- Treatment is supportive with IV fluids and monitoring. Mechanical ventilation may be needed in severe cases. Symptoms resolve within 24-48 hours and survivors do not exhibit long-lasting effects.
- DOH's Disease Outbreak Control Division monitors cases of PSP. Please report suspected cases to DOH.

Dear Healthcare Provider:

The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) received notice from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that shellfish harvested in certain parts of Washington and Oregon have been found to be contaminated with saxitoxin, the neurotoxin that causes Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP). Some of this contaminated shellfish was distributed to stores and restaurants in Hawaii.

To date, no cases of PSP have been identified in Hawaii, however because of the potential severity of this illness, health care providers should be aware of the clinical presentation and treatment options.

Symptoms of PSP begin within 30-60 minutes of ingestion of the contaminated shellfish and may include numbness and tingling to the perioral area, tongue, face, torso, arms and legs as well as gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Cases in which a significant amount of the toxin has been ingested may rapidly progress to ataxia, dysphagia, mental status changes, and flaccid paralysis. Severe cases include paralysis of the respiratory and abdominal muscles leading to respiratory failure.

Treatment is supportive with careful monitoring and IV fluids if indicated. Mechanical ventilation may be required for severe cases that experience paralysis of respiratory muscles.

Symptoms resolve within 24-48 hours and patients that survive do not experience residual or long-lasting effects.

If Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning is suspected, healthcare providers should:

- Fully evaluate patient, monitor for signs of respiratory failure and provide supportive care as indicated.
- Attempt to identify and document the source (restaurant or store) of the shellfish the patient ate just prior to development of symptoms.
- Report cases to DOH as soon as possible:

**Oahu (Disease Reporting Line):** (808) 586-4586

**Maui District Health Office:** (808) 984-8213

**Kauai District Health Office:** (808) 241-3563

**Hawaii District Health Office:** (808) 933-0912

**After Hours (Physician's Exchange):** (808) 600-3625 or call Toll Free 1-800-360-2575

More information on Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning:

- Saxitoxins are produced by phytoplankton (marine algae) that are consumed by certain types of shellfish such as clams, mussels, oysters and scallops. The saxitoxins then build-up in the shellfish flesh, presenting a risk to humans who ingest the shellfish.
- Shellfish containing saxitoxins look and smell normal. Although associated with "Red Tides," the shellfish can be contaminated even with clear waters.
- Cooking and freezing shellfish does not eliminate the toxins.

For more information on paralytic shellfish poisoning and the current detections in shellfish from Oregon and Washington, please visit the following online resources:

- [DOH News Release](#)
- [FDA Advisory](#)
- [CDC Information on Food Poisoning from Marine Toxins](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health: Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Hawaii Department of Health Disease Outbreak Control Division at 808-586-4586.

Sincerely,



Diana Felton, MD

Chief, DOH Communicable Disease and Public Health Nursing Division