



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness



March 20 2019

Re: Illness associated with butter clams

The First Nations Health Authority and Northern Health are warning the public following probable cases of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) associated with consuming butter clams harvested during November 2018 on Dundas Island. Paralytic shellfish poisoning occurs from ingesting bivalve shellfish (such as mussels, oysters, and clams) that contain toxins produced by planktons during harmful algal blooms. These toxins can cause severe and life-threatening neurological effects. Symptoms include tingling and numbness spreading from lips, mouth to face and extremities, dizziness, arm and leg weakness, paralysis, difficulty breathing and death. Health authorities are asking you to take the following precautions and actions:

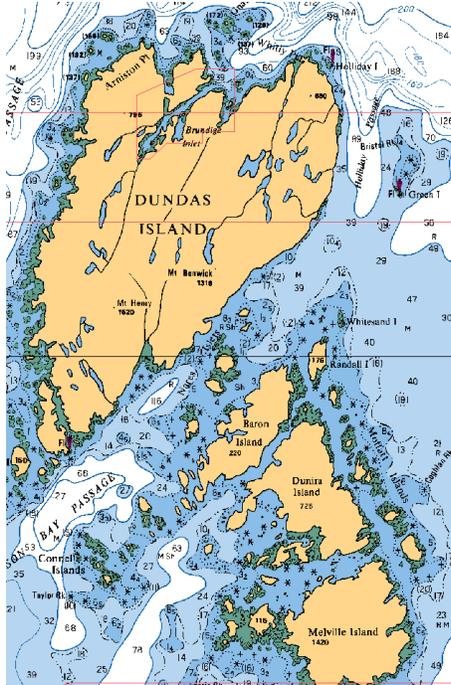
- **Do not consume butter clams harvested from areas that have not been tested for biotoxins, and/or are not open for harvest under the Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program, including Dundas Island.** Butter clams should only be consumed when toxin is absent or found to be below harmful levels. Butter clams can retain toxins from harmful algal blooms for up to two years.
- **If you are ill**, visit your physician, health centre or the emergency department immediately to ensure treatment and confirmation of the cause of illness. Let your health care provider know if you have eaten clams in the past 24 hours.
- Cooking or freezing clams does not destroy the toxins. Cooked clams can still be toxic.
- Ensure other community members who may have received butter clams are aware of these precautions and actions. If they are ill, we request that they be in contact with their physician or Health Centre.
- Harvesters are reminded to check area closures prior to harvesting clams to prevent illness. Always verify that the harvesting beach is open with your First Nations fisheries programs, the Department of Fisheries, <http://dfo-mpo.gc.ca/shellfish-mollusques/cssp-map-eng.htm> or on the BC Centre of Disease website, <http://maps.bccdc.ca/shellfish/>.

The investigation into the Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning cases is ongoing and in collaboration with BC Centre for Disease Control and First Nations communities. This includes the testing of leftover food samples, clinical samples and assessing the handling and distribution of the harvested product. Any future advice or recommendations will be made in partnership with First Nations communities.

Learn more about shellfish harvesting at <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/prevention-public-health/shellfish-harvesting-safety> and Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning at <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/paralytic-shellfish-poisoning>.

Find more information on Food Safety for First Nations communities at:
www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-for-first-nations/environmental-health-and-safety/food-safety. Advice on symptoms can also be obtained by calling BC HealthLink at 811.

Map of Dundas Island



First Nations Health Media Advisory Line: 604-831-4898

Northern Health Media Advisory Line: 1-877-961-7724