

Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning Fact Sheet

What is Diarrhetic shellfish poisoning?

As the name suggests, Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP) is an illness with gastrointestinal symptoms, predominantly nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping, and diarrhea. Humans get DSP by eating contaminated shellfish. Shellfish become contaminated by eating algae from the genus *Dinophysis*, which produce toxins. The amount of toxin becomes high enough to make people sick when *Dinophysis* spp. bloom, which is one kind of Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB).

What are the symptoms of DSP?

Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning is an illness with gastrointestinal symptoms, predominantly nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping, and diarrhea. Symptoms usually start between 30 minutes and 15 hours after eating contaminated shellfish. While the symptoms can be severe, they are not life-threatening and patients typically recover in a few days.

Which seafoods pose a DSP risk to humans?

All bivalve molluscan shellfish including clams, mussels, oysters, geoducks, and scallops can contain DSP toxins. DSP toxins accumulate in certain glands and organs, so it is possible for scallops to be rendered safe by removing the gland and only eating the adductor muscle.

Is the shellfish safe to eat if I cook it or clean it?

No! Cooking or rinsing or trimming the shellfish doesn't make them safe to eat because the *DSP toxins are not destroyed by heating or freezing*. Toxins may be present throughout the meat of shellfish.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone who eats noncommercially harvested shellfish is at risk for DSP.

How can I tell if shellfish have DSP?

Only laboratories can reliably test shellfish for DSP. Toxins can be present with no visible signs. You cannot tell from looking at the shellfish, the beach, or the water. Shellfish contaminated with DSP don't look or taste different than other shellfish.

How can I protect my family and myself from diarrhetic shellfish poisoning?

The only way to protect your family and yourself from DSP is by not eating noncommercial shellfish collected from beaches in Alaska. Commercial shellfish in Alaska are routinely tested and are considered safe to eat. Do not assume a beach is safe because you have harvested from it before, or because someone else has harvested from it recently.

What should I do if I think that I have diarrhetic shellfish poisoning?

Contact the Section of Epidemiology to report your illness. If symptoms are mild, you can contact your healthcare provider. If symptoms are severe, consider calling 911 or asking someone to take you to a healthcare provider. There is no treatment for DSP specifically, but medical care can be helpful if a patient becomes dehydrated from diarrhea and vomiting.