

Toxic Shellfish Poisoning Information Sheet

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What is it?

Salt water shellfish can be affected by naturally occurring toxins (poisons), known as marine biotoxins. Shellfish are a high risk food because they store bacteria, viruses, protozoa, biotoxins and pollution. This information sheet is about poisoning, known as toxic shellfish poisoning, from eating shellfish contaminated with these naturally occurring toxins.

The gut contents of Crayfish, Crab, Paua, and Kina seafood can also have the toxin in at levels that could cause illness as well.

For other illness caused by bacteria and viruses in shellfish see the HBDHB "Gastroenteritis Information Sheet" <add link>

What are the signs and symptoms?

There are four main kinds of toxic shellfish poisoning, with different signs and symptoms:

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP):

- Numb and/or tingling around the lips, mouth, face, neck, and extremities.
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing
- Dizziness, double vision
- In severe cases, paralysis, respiratory failure
- Usually occurring within 12 hours of eating shellfish

Neurotoxic Shellfish Poisoning (NSP)

- Numb and/or tingling around the mouth, face, neck, and extremities
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing.

- Difficulty feeling the difference between hot and cold objects.
- In severe cases paralysis
- Usually occurring within 12-24 hours of consuming shellfish

Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning (ASP)

Mild Cases

- Diarrhoea (runny poo) and vomiting
- Usually occurring within 24 hours of eating shellfish

Severe Cases

- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Confusion, memory loss, and disorientation
- Usually within 48 hours of eating shellfish

Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP)

- Diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting and stomach pain
- Usually within 12-24hrs of eating shellfish

How serious is it?

Paralytic and Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning have caused deaths in outbreaks overseas.

Who is most at risk?

The elderly, young, and those with immune system problems are most at risk.

How could I get infected?

Anyone is at risk if they eat shellfish, or the gut contents of crayfish, crab, paua, and kina from coastal waters affected by marine biotoxins that cause toxic shellfish poisoning.

How do I protect myself and others?

To avoid getting toxic shellfish poisoning

Before collecting shellfish:

- check where marine biotoxin warnings are in place
- go to www.mpi.govt.nz/travel-and-recreation/fishing/shellfish-biotoxin-alerts/ The Ministry of Primary Industries is the lead agency for food safety in New Zealand
- Look for any warning notices at, or close-by the area you are looking to collect from.
<http://www.ttophs.govt.nz/vdb/document/1494>

Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?

This will depend on how unwell you feel. Ask your doctor about this.

You have to eat infected shellfish to get toxic shellfish poisoning. It cannot be passed from one person to another.

How is it treated?

There is no cure for toxic shellfish poisoning. If you think you, or someone else, has toxic shellfish poisoning seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Where can I get further information?

For further information on toxic shellfish poisoning please contact your doctor or Hawke's Bay District Health Board Population Health on (06) 834 1815. You can also phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 at any time of the day or night to speak to a registered nurse.

You can also find more information at:

<http://www.mpi.govt.nz/food-safety/community-food/wild-foods/food-safety-when-fishing-or-gathering-shellfish/>