

Shellfish Poisoning General Information

What is shellfish poisoning?

In some coastal waters, shellfish eat a type of algae that contains toxins which act like a poison in the body. When people eat the shellfish, they may become seriously ill.

Who can get shellfish poisoning?

Anyone who eats contaminated shellfish that contain these toxins can get shellfish poisoning. Normal boiling, steaming or any other method of cooking does NOT destroy these toxins. Properly cooked shellfish may still be poisonous and these toxins are not detectable by sight or smell. Freezing raw and cooked shellfish does NOT destroy these toxins either.

What are the symptoms?

- Numbness and tingling around the lips and tongue
- Numbness and tingling in the hands and feet
- Muscle weakness, lack of muscle coordination
- Slurred speech
- Paralysis

These symptoms may lead to coma, breathing problems and death.

What is the treatment?

There is no cure, antidote or vaccine for shellfish poisoning. If you suffer any of these symptoms after eating shellfish, contact your doctor or emergency centre immediately.

How can you prevent shellfish poisoning?

- Caution is required when harvesting shellfish. Contact the nearest Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) office or visit dfo-mpo.gc.ca/shellfish-mollusques/index-eng.htm to find out which areas are assigned as “open” for shellfish harvesting.
- An “open” area refers to a safe harvest area that is subject to monitoring and testing, and where harvesting is a legal activity. When an area is officially “closed,” it is illegal to harvest shellfish in that area for any purpose.
- Only shellfish harvested from harvest areas designated as “open” should be consumed.
- Purchase only fresh shellfish and purchase only from reputable suppliers that have harvested from “open” areas. A retailer selling raw shellfish should be able to produce a shellfish shipper’s tag.
- Shellfish should be refrigerated or frozen until they are ready to be eaten.

- The toxins associated with shellfish poisoning can also be present in seafood available in other countries. Tourists should be cautious when consuming seafood, including shellfish, abroad.
- Anyone who feels ill after eating bivalve shellfish should immediately seek medical attention.
- Health Canada advises that adults limit their consumption of lobster tomalley to no more than the amount from one cooked lobster per day and does not recommend consumption by children. healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2014/39847a-eng.php
- The [***Canadian Shellfish Sanitation Program \(CSSP\)***](#) is responsible for monitoring of water quality and reporting adverse water conditions to the public.

For further education please refer to Health Canada's Healthy Canadians [***Shellfish Food Safety***](#) website and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada [***The dangers of illegal harvesting***](#).