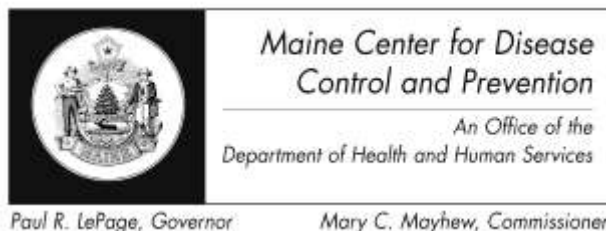


Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning Fact Sheet



What is Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning (ASP)?

ASP is caused by certain marine toxins produced by red-brown, saltwater algae. These organisms, in large concentration, are often referred to as "harmful algal blooms" (HAB's) and can produce "marine biotoxins". The toxins are naturally occurring chemicals that can contaminate certain seafood. The seafood contaminated with these chemicals frequently looks, smells, and tastes normal. When humans eat such seafood, poisoning can result.

How is ASP transmitted?

When there is a large concentration of these toxins certain types of shellfish may be contaminated. These include shellfish with two shells, such as mussels, cockles, clams and oysters, as well as the digestive tissues of scallops and the digestive tissues (tomalley) of lobsters and crabs. An individual may get ASP if any of these shellfish are consumed primarily from April through October. **Cooking this contaminated shellfish does not kill the toxin.**

What are the symptoms of ASP?

Poisoning generally begins with gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms. Symptoms such as headache, confusion, dizziness, disorientation and memory loss may occur after the GI symptoms. Memory loss may persist, even after other symptoms resolve. In severe cases of ASP, seizures, weakness and paralysis or death may occur.

When do symptoms appear?

Symptoms begin within 24 hours of eating the contaminated shellfish.

What is the treatment for ASP?

There is no treatment, only supportive care of symptoms.

Who can get ASP?

Any individual that eats contaminated shellfish can get sick.

What can be done to prevent ASP?

- Check with local health officials before collecting shellfish, and look for Department of Marine Resources advisories about algal blooms, accessed at http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public_health/index.htm or the Hotline at 1-800-232-4733
- Do not eat finfish or shellfish sold as bait. Bait products do not need to meet the same food safety regulations as seafood for human consumption.
- Do not harvest shellfish from floating containers or harvested from open ocean.
- Consume shellfish from certified dealers only.

What other shellfish toxins cause illness and where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also go to the Maine Department of Marine Resources site at <http://www.maine.gov/dmr/index.htm>, the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention at www.maine.gov/idepi or call 1-800-821-5821. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website <http://www.cdc.gov> is another excellent source of health information.