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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Maine CDC and Department of Marine Resources

Remind People to Consume Shellfish Safely

New Test Results Prompt Re-Issuance of Advisory

AUGUSTA - With an incident of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP, also known as red tide poisoning) being reported earlier this month and new test results showing high levels of PSP in the tomalley of some lobster, the Department of Health and Human Services Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) and the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) remind people to follow long-established safety precautions when dining on shellfish.

"Mainers and those who are enjoying their visits to our state can follow some simple steps when they enjoy shellfish to assure their safety," said Dr. Dora Anne Mills, Director of the Maine CDC.

They are:

1. Purchase shellfish from a certified shellfish dealer. Their operations undergo rigorous public health screening and auditing.
2. If harvesting for personal use, make sure the shellfish beds are not closed for red tide. Check the Department of Marine Resources' website for the latest information on closed areas:
(http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public_health/closures/pspclosures.htm)
3. Do not consume mussels or clams from open waters. Clam and mussels from open waters are likely to have filtered much more algae-containing water than those from flats or beds, and therefore will generally have much higher concentrations of toxin.
4. When eating lobster, do not consume the tomalley.

Tomalley is a soft, green substance found in the body cavity of the lobster. It functions as the liver.

"Much like the liver of other animals, the tomalley serves as a natural filter for contaminants that are in the water," said Mills. "That is one reason why the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has advised consumers for many years not to eat tomalley. However, lobster meat is safe to eat."

Some coastal waters in New England and the Maritime Provinces of Canada currently have high PSP levels due to summertime algae blooms in coastal waters and are closed to clam and mussel harvesting. Bivalve shellfish such as clams, mussels, oysters, and quahogs filter water and eat the toxic algae from the water. High concentrations of the toxin can then cause serious illness if eaten by people.

As part of DMR's ongoing monitoring, some high levels of PSP were found in the tomalley in some lobsters. Therefore, consuming tomalley could cause people to be ill. Similar advisories on tomalley due to PSP are in effect in Canada.

Symptoms of PSP (red tide poisoning) include tingling and/or numbness of the mouth, face, or neck; muscle weakness; headaches; and nausea. In extreme cases, in which the person has consumed high amounts of the toxin, these symptoms can lead to respiratory failure. Symptoms usually occur within two hours of eating contaminated shellfish. Anyone who has eaten shellfish and experiences these symptoms should seek immediate medical care.

Although it had been about 30 years since the last report of Mainers with red tide poisoning, the state has seen two incidents in the past year, involving a total of seven people. Both incidents involved people from Washington County consuming mussels harvested for personal use and from mussels growing off from a rope or barrel floating in the ocean in areas closed for shellfish harvesting because of red tide.

FMI:

Maine Department of Marine Resources Red Tide Closures:

http://www.maine.gov/dmr/rm/public_health/closures/pspclosures.htm

Maine CDC/DHHS Red Tide Information:

http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/maine_cdc_red_tide_information.htm

Northern New England Poison Center Red Tide Information:

http://www.mmc.org/mmc_body.cfm?id=2166

or 800-222-1222