



## **DOH Escambia County Health Department**

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### **Red Tide Health Advisory** [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

PENSACOLA – Due to recent citizen reports of respiratory distress – such as persistent cough and watery eyes – while at Pensacola area beaches, the Escambia County Health Department is issuing a health advisory for red tide. To date, citizen reports are from the Pensacola Beach area, however the health department is monitoring the situation and will issue additional health advisories if needed.

A red-tide event does not produce urgent public health concerns, but may result in mild and short-lived respiratory symptoms such as eye, nose, and throat irritation similar to cold symptoms. Exposure to red tide can lead to varying degrees of eye, nose, and throat irritation similar to cold symptoms. Health officials recommend that people experiencing these symptoms stay away from beach areas -- once a person leaves the red tide area, the symptoms usually go away. People with severe or chronic respiratory conditions such as asthma or chronic lung disease are cautioned to avoid red tide areas which, to date, are reported by citizens as Pensacola Beach.

Precautions should be taken when preparing and cooking fish caught in local waters, and individuals should not eat locally-harvested molluscan shellfish such as oysters, clams, and coquinas when red tide may be present. Red tide may also cause fish kills.

Residents living in beach areas are advised to close windows and run the air conditioner (making sure that the A/C filter is maintained according to manufacturer's specifications). If outdoors, residents may choose to wear paper filter masks, especially if onshore winds are blowing. For people with long-term exposure, such as beach workers or fishermen, a more properly fitted mask is recommended.

Red tide can affect humans if they consume contaminated molluscan shellfish or come into contact with the organism through the water or the beach air. During a red tide, bivalve shellfish, including clams and oysters, can concentrate the toxin and cause neurotoxic shellfish poisoning (NSP) in humans if eaten. Both mild

gastrointestinal and neurological symptoms occur in NSP, which can include tingling and numbness of lips, tongue, and throat, muscular aches, dizziness, reversal of the sensations of hot and cold, diarrhea, and vomiting. Onset of this illness occurs within a few minutes to a few hours; duration is fairly short, from a few hours to several days. Recovery is complete with few after effects; no fatalities have been reported.

Cooking does not eliminate the toxin. Only clams and oysters collected in shellfish harvesting areas monitored and open for harvesting, as determined by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS), should be eaten. Scallops may be consumed as long as only the muscle is eaten. Any healthy finfish harvested from red tide affected waters should be carefully filleted and cooked fresh, avoiding consumption of roe and internal organs. The meat of fresh, healthy fish should be safe to eat.

The other human effects of red tide are temporary, with no long-term health effects. Individuals with severe chronic respiratory conditions such as emphysema or asthma should avoid beach areas and contact with water spray during red tide conditions. Susceptible people may experience varying degrees of eye, nose, and throat irritation similar to cold symptoms when coming into contact with salt water spray (such as from water skiing, prop turbulence, windsurfing). A rash can sometimes occur after contact with affected water, and usually goes away within 24 hours. After swimming in an affected area, it is a good idea to rinse off with clean fresh water. Swallowed water is unlikely to cause health effects.

Many questions are asked about what to do with the fish that have died during red tide conditions. Contact with fish killed in a red tide event does not produce any red tide associated symptoms. However, these fish can present a nuisance, in that they have an unpleasant odor, and attract flies and vermin. These fish may be disposed of according to local solid waste practices. It is recommended that gloves or tools be used to collect any fish and to use double-lined plastic bags for disposal.

Attached is a summary of common questions and answers about red tide. The public may obtain more information on ongoing red tide events from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. The Institutes' website is <http://research.myfwc.com/>.

The Florida Poison Control Information Center in Miami has a toll-free 24/7 Aquatic Toxins Hotline for reporting of illnesses from exposure to red tide, or for more information on red tide and associated health effects, at 1-888-232-8635.