Food Safety in California

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in six, or 48 million Americans contract a foodborne illness each year. Of those that become sick, nearly 128,000 people will be hospitalized and 3,000 will die as a result of their illness. There are some easy and effective steps you can take to help lessen your chance of contracting a foodborne illness – please see the quick link for “Safe Food Handling Practices.”

Within the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), is the Food, Drug, and Radiation Safety Division of the Center for Environmental Health. The Food and Drug Branch’s mission is to protect and improve the health of all California residents by assuring that foods, drugs, medical devices and certain other consumer products are safe and are not adulterated, misbranded or falsely advertised; and that drugs and medical devices are effective.

Domoic Acid

Domoic acid is a naturally occurring toxin that is related to a “bloom” of a particular single-celled diatom called Pseudo-nitzschia. CDPH coordinates with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the fishing community to test for domoic acid. The conditions that support the growth of Pseudo-nitzschia are impossible to predict. Crustaceans, fish and shellfish are capable of accumulating elevated levels of domoic acid without apparent ill effects on the animals. Elevated levels of domoic acid in crustaceans, fish and shellfish pose a significant risk to the public if they are consumed. Domoic acid can be fatal to people if consumed in high doses. Symptoms of domoic acid poisoning can occur within 30 minutes to 24 hours after eating toxic seafood. In mild cases, symptoms may include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, headache and dizziness. These symptoms disappear within several days. In severe cases, the victim may experience trouble breathing, confusion, disorientation, cardiovascular instability, seizures, excessive bronchial secretions, permanent loss of short-term memory (a condition known as Amnesic Shellfish Poisoning), coma or death.

The Domoic Acid Advisory remains in effect for rock crab in areas north of San Luis Obispo County and for Dungeness crab in state waters north of the Sonoma/Mendocino County due to continued elevated levels of domoic acid in crabs from those areas. To receive updated information about shellfish poisoning and quarantines, call CDPH’s toll-free Shellfish Information Line at (800) 553-4133. For additional information, visit CDPH’s Natural Marine Toxins: PSP and Domoic Acid Web page and CDPH’s Domoic Acid health information Web page, please see the quick link on the right.