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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CLOSES TRIBUTARIES IN THE HAMPTON ROADS AREA TO SHELLFISH HARVESTING

(RICHMOND, Va.)— The Virginia Department of Health announced today that major tributaries in the Hampton Roads area will be closed to shellfish harvesting due to intense rainfall. The emergency closure is effective midnight tonight through October 6, 2010.

The emergency closure includes the following:

- Pagan River,
- Chuckatuck Creek
- Nansemond River
- Back River,
- Poquoson River
- Back Creek,
- Lynnhaven River and its complex of Linkhorn and Broad Bays.

A map of the affected areas is posted at www.vdh.virginia.gov/Shellfish/. The affected shellfish are bivalve mollusks including oysters, clams and scallops, but not crabs or fin fish.

“Monitoring shellfish harvesting beds is an important way to protect the health of Virginians,” said state health commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA, FAAP. “We watch shellfish beds for contaminants after major storms to ensure any seafood harvested there does not contain harmful substances that will make consumers of these shellfish ill. The closed areas will be reopened as soon as test results indicate that they are safe to reopen.”

Heavy rainfall may wash animal waste and human sewage into these waterways. Due to potential microbiological and chemical pollution hazards, shellfish taken from areas affected by the emergency closure are unacceptable for consumption.

Ingesting shellfish taken from the closed areas could cause gastrointestinal illnesses including norovirus, hepatitis A and shigellosis.

For more information on shellfish closures, see the frequently asked questions on shellfish condemnations at www.vdh.virginia.gov/EnvironmentalHealth/Shellfish/faq/index.htm.

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