

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CLOSES THE JAMES RIVER AND A PORTION OF THE RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER TO SHELLFISH HARVESTING

(RICHMOND, Va.)— The Virginia Department of Health announced today that the James River and a portion of the Rappahannock River will be closed to shellfish harvesting due to flooding in those rivers. The emergency closure is effective January 27, 2010.

The James River will be closed down to the vicinity of the Monitor Merrimac Memorial Bridge-Tunnel, Interstate 664. The Rappahannock River will be closed down to a line extending from Monaskon on the north shore to Stove Point on the south shore.

Maps of the affected areas are posted on the Division of Shellfish Sanitation's home page at www.vdh.virginia.gov/EnvironmentalHealth/Shellfish/. The affected shellfish are bivalve mollusks including oysters and clams, but not crabs or fin fish.

“Monitoring shellfish harvesting beds is an important means to protect the health of Virginians,” said State Health Commissioner Karen Remley, M.D., MBA. “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 in the western portions of Virginia with the ensuing runoff may have washed animal waste and human sewage into the rivers. Due to potential microbiological and chemical pollution hazards, shellfish taken from areas affected by the emergency closure are currently unacceptable for consumption.

Ingesting shellfish taken from the closed areas at this time 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/.

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