

A Guide to Eating Fish Safely in Massachusetts

Please note: These guidelines predate the Gulf Oil Spill and the Japan nuclear incident. For up to date information, visit your local Department of Public Health's website.

They advise that pregnant women, nursing mothers, and women who may become pregnant DO NOT EAT any fish from these freshwater bodies or certain fish and shellfish caught in some Massachusetts coastal waters.

Children under the age of 12 are also at risk and SHOULD NOT EAT these fish.

A varied diet, including SAFE fish, will lead to good nutrition and better health. Fish is good for you – remember to choose fish that are safe to eat (see reverse).

What is Unsafe about the Fish and Shellfish Listed in This Advisory?

These fish and shellfish may contain chemicals that can harm you and your baby's health. This advisory does not apply to fish stocked in lakes and ponds.

What Chemicals Are They?

Mercury and PCBs are the primary contaminants of concern. Mercury is a naturally occurring metal found in the environment. However, mercury is also released by burning trash or burning coal for fuel. Once released into the air it can travel long distances and be deposited in soil and in water bodies. PCBs are man-made chemicals that were banned in the 1970's. However, due to their widespread use, they can still be found in our environment and get into our food.

How do Chemicals and Metals get into Fish?

Chemicals and metals get into the fish from pollution in the water and sediments where they live. Larger species feed on smaller species and the process of bioaccumulation begins. Bioaccumulation means that chemicals or metal concentrate in the fish. The larger, old fish concentrate the most chemicals.

How do These Chemicals Affect Health?

Developing fetuses, nursing babies, and young children are affected by mercury. Small amounts can damage a brain even before birth. High levels of mercury can affect how well children learn, think, behave, and develop later in life. Children who have been exposed to mercury in the womb can experience symptoms even if their mothers do not. PCBs can also affect developing fetuses, nursing babies, and young children.

Is There a Way of Cleaning or Cooking the Fish to Get Rid of the Chemicals?

Remove the skin, any fatty material, and dark meat from the fish before cooking. Broil the fish instead of frying it to allow as much fat as possible to be drained away. However, if the fish contains mercury, there is no way to clean or remove the chemical. It can't be cut, cleaned or cooked out.

Can These Chemicals Affect Adults and Older Children?

Yes. At higher levels, adults and older children can experience health effects from these chemicals. Some of these chemicals can affect memory or behavior. They can make your skin tingle or feel numb. Some are also suspected of causing liver problems and some types of cancer.

Should My Family and I Stop Eating Fish Altogether?

Not necessarily. Fish is good for you and your family. It is a good source of protein and low in fat. It may also protect you against heart disease. If you may become pregnant or are pregnant or nursing, you and your children under 12 years old may safely eat 12 oz (about 2 meals) per week of fish or shellfish classified as "Safe to Eat" on the attached list. Otherwise, it is important to follow the Safe Eating Guidelines attached.

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NOT SAFE TO EAT

- ⊗ Freshwater fish caught in Massachusetts lakes, streams, rivers, or ponds.
- ⊗ Any fish, shellfish, or lobster caught in Boston Harbor or New Bedford Harbor
- ⊗ Lobster tomalley from ANY source (the soft green substance found in the tail and body section of the lobster)
- ⊗ Swordfish
- ⊗ Shark
- ⊗ King Mackerel
- ⊗ Tilefish
- ⊗ Tuna Steak
- ⊗ Bluefish caught off the Massachusetts coast
- ⊗ Farm-Raised Salmon
- ⊗ Barracuda Fish (contain neurotoxins)
- ⊗ Albacore Tuna

SAFE TO EAT TWICE A WEEK

- ✓ Canned Chunk Light Tuna – 6oz. (Small children including toddlers should eat less)
- ✓ Fish stocked in Massachusetts lakes, streams, rivers, or ponds.
- ✓ Cod
- ✓ Flounder
- ✓ Haddock
- ✓ Pollock
- ✓ Wild Salmon
- ✓ Alaskan Farm-Raised Salmon

For more information on how to choose fish that are safe to eat please contact:

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