INITIAL DRAFT ADVISORY

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN, WOMEN WHO MAY BECOME PREGNANT, NURSING MOTHERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN ABOUT THE RISKS OF MERCURY IN FISH AND SHELLFISH

Fish and shellfish can be an important part of a balanced diet. It is a good source of high quality protein and other nutrients and is low in fat.

However, some fish and shellfish contain high levels of a form of mercury called methylmercury that can harm the developing nervous system of an unborn baby or young child. It is important for pregnant women, women of childbearing age who may become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children to eat the types and amounts of fish and shellfish that are safe, to prevent any harm from methylmercury and still enjoy the health benefits of eating seafood. Young children should follow the same advice as adults regarding the types of fish to eat, but should eat less because they are smaller.

HOW DOES MERCURY GET INTO FISH AND SHELLFISH?

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and it can also be released into the air through industrial pollution. Mercury falls from the air and can get into surface water accumulating in streams and oceans. Bacteria in the water cause chemical changes that transform mercury into methylmercury that can be toxic. Fish and shellfish can absorb methylmercury as they feed on aquatic organisms.

HOW CAN YOU AVOID LEVELS OF MERCURY THAT COULD HARM CHILDREN?

Nearly all fish and shellfish contain trace amounts of methylmercury, which are not harmful to humans. However, some fish and shellfish, including those sold in grocery stores and restaurants and those which are caught in local lakes and rivers can accumulate more mercury than others and therefore pose the greatest risk to people who eat them.

WHAT FISH AND SHELLFISH PURCHASED IN A GROCERY STORE OR RESTAURANT SHOULD YOU AVOID?

You should not eat these fish that can contain high levels of methylmercury.

- Shark
- Swordfish
- King mackerel
- Tilefish
IS IT ALL RIGHT TO EAT OTHER FISH AND SHELLFISH PURCHASED FROM GROCERY STORES OR RESTAURANTS?

Yes. As long as you select a variety of other kinds of fish and shellfish purchased in stores and restaurants, it is safe to enjoy eating them as part of a healthful diet. It is safe for adults to eat up to 12 ounces per week (usually 2-3 meals per week). Children should eat lesser amounts depending on their size.

It is important to choose a variety of different species each week. Choose a combination from shellfish, canned fish, smaller ocean fish, or farmed-raised fish. Some of the most commonly consumed fish and shellfish that have low levels of mercury are shrimp, salmon, pollock, farm-raised catfish, and light canned tuna.

Tuna is the most frequently consumed fish in the United States. Mercury levels in tuna vary. Unlike canned light tuna, tuna steaks and albacore canned tuna contain higher levels of methylmercury because they are larger fish.

WHAT ABOUT FISH AND SHELLFISH CAUGHT BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS OR FROM LOCAL WATERS? ARE THEY SAFE TO EAT?

Some kinds of fish and shellfish caught in your local waters may have higher or much lower than average levels of methylmercury. Those with lower levels may be safely eaten more frequently and in larger amounts. Contact your state or local health department or other appropriate food safety authority for specific consumption recommendations about fish and shellfish caught in your local area.

If no local advice is available, adults can safely consume up to 6 ounces (one meal) of locally caught fish and shellfish per week. Children again should eat lesser amounts depending on their size. If no local advice is available, do not consume fish and shellfish bought in stores and restaurants AND fish and shellfish bought by family and friends in the same week unless your local advisories say it is safe to do so.

WHAT IF YOU EAT MORE THAN THE RECOMMENDED AMOUNT OF FISH AND SHELLFISH A WEEK?

There is no harm in eating more than the recommended amount of fish and shellfish in one week as long as you don’t do it on a regular basis. One week’s consumption does not change the level of methylmercury in the body much at all. If you eat a lot of fish and shellfish one week, you can cut back the next week or two.
SECOND DRAFT ADVISORY

ADVICE FOR WOMEN WHO ARE PREGNANT, OR WHO MIGHT BECOME PREGNANT, AND NURSING MOTHERS, ABOUT AVOIDING HARM TO YOUR BABY OR YOUNG CHILD FROM MERCURY IN FISH AND SHELLFISH

Fish and shellfish can be an important part of a balance diet. It is a good source of high quality protein and other nutrients and is low in fat. The Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency are advising pregnant women and nursing mothers to eat the types and amounts of fish and shellfish that are safe to prevent any harm to the developing nervous system of their baby or young child. Since mercury may build up in your body and be there when you become pregnant, women who may become pregnant need to follow this advice as well.

To protect your baby follow these 3 rules:

1. Do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King mackerel, or Tilefish.
2. Limit your consumption of all other fish and shellfish you buy to no more than 12 ounces (2 to 3 meals) of fish and shellfish a week. Mix up the types of fish and shellfish you eat and do not eat the same type of fish and shellfish more than once a week.
3. Check local advisories about the safety of fish caught in your local rivers and streams. If no advice is available, limit consumption of fish from local waters to 6 ounces per week.

Follow these same 3 rules when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but the serving sizes should be smaller.

For further information about the risks of mercury in fish and shellfish call the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's food information line toll-free at 1-888-SAFEFOOD or visit FDA's Food Safety website www.cfsan.fda.gov

For further information about the safety of locally caught fish and shellfish, visit the Environmental Protection Agency’s Fish Advisory website www.epa.gov/ost/fish

or contact your State or Local Health Department. A list of state or local health department contacts is available at www.epa.gov/ost/fish. Click on Federal, State, and Tribal Contacts.
Read on if you want more information:

What is mercury?
Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and can also be released into the air through industrial pollution. It falls from the air and can accumulate in streams and oceans and is turned into methylmercury in the water. It is this type of mercury that is harmful to your baby. Fish absorb the methylmercury as they feed in these waters and so it may build up in the fish. It builds up more in some types of fish than others, depending on what the fish eat, which is why the levels in the fish vary.

Is there methylmercury in all fish?
Nearly all fish contain traces of methylmercury. However, larger fish that have lived longer have the highest levels of methylmercury because they've had more time to accumulate it. These large fish (swordfish, shark, king mackerel and tilefish) pose the greatest risk to pregnant women. Other types of fish are safe to eat in the amounts recommended by FDA and EPA. If you want more information about the levels in various types of fish see the FDA food safety website. www.cfsan.fda.gov or the EPA website at www.epa.gov/ost/fish

What about tuna?
Tuna is the most frequently consumed fish in the United States. Mercury levels in tuna vary. Tuna steaks and canned albacore tuna generally contain higher levels of mercury than canned light tuna.

I'm not pregnant - so why should I be concerned about methylmercury?
If you regularly eat types of fish that are high in methylmercury, it can accumulate in your bloodstream over time. Methylmercury is removed from the body naturally, but it may take over a year for the levels to drop significantly. Thus, it may be present in a woman even before she becomes pregnant. This is one of the reasons why women who are trying to become pregnant should also avoid eating certain types of fish.

How could methylmercury affect my baby or young child?
The developing nervous system of a baby in its mother’s womb is susceptible to high levels of methylmercury. Babies exposed to high levels of methylmercury can develop problems such as minor delays in learning to walk or talk. Once the baby is born and as it gets older the risks become less and less. If you follow the advice given by FDA and EPA you will gain the positive benefits of fish but avoid the medical problems associated with the mercury in fish.

But I though fish was good for me when I am pregnant.
It is in moderation. Scientists have learnt that some types of fish contain levels of mercury in them that may harm your unborn child. This is why FDA and EPA are advising you to avoid certain types of fish and eat other fish in moderation. By
eating these other types of fish in moderation you will get the benefits of fish but avoid the harm.

**Why do I need to get local advice for locally caught fish?**
Some kinds of fish and shellfish caught in your local waters may have higher or much lower than average levels of mercury. This depends on the levels of mercury in the water in which the fish are caught. Those fish with lower levels may be safely eaten more frequently and in larger amounts.

**What are “types” of fish and shellfish?**
Types of fish and shellfish are identified by their common names such as albacore tuna, Atlantic salmon, cod, haddock, grouper, blue crabs, shrimp, etc.

**How can learn about local advisories?**
Before you go fishing, check your Fishing Regulations Booklet for information about local advisories. You can also contact your local health department for information about local advisories.

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**Note:** If you have questions or think you’ve been exposed to methylmercury, see your doctor or health care provider immediately.
THIRD DRAFT ADVISORY

ADVICE FOR WOMEN WHO ARE PREGNANT, OR WHO MIGHT BECOME PREGNANT, AND NURSING MOTHERS, ABOUT AVOIDING HARM TO YOUR BABY OR YOUNG CHILD FROM MERCURY IN FISH AND SHELLFISH.

Fish and shellfish can be an important part of a balanced diet. It is a good source of high quality protein and other nutrients and is low in fat. The FDA and EPA are advising pregnant women and nursing mothers to eat the types and amounts of fish and shellfish that are safe to prevent harm to the development of their baby or young child.

If you follow advice given by FDA and EPA you will gain the positive benefits of eating fish but avoid any developmental problems from mercury in fish.

To protect your baby follow these 3 rules:

1. Do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel, or Tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury

2. Levels of mercury in other fish can vary. You can safely eat up to 12 ounces (2 to 3 meals) of other fish and shellfish a week. Mix up the types of fish and shellfish you eat and do not eat the same type of fish and shellfish more than once a week.

3. Check local advisories about the safety of fish caught in your local rivers and streams. If no advice is available, you can safely eat up to 6 ounces (one meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters.

Follow these same rules when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but the serving sizes should be smaller.

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