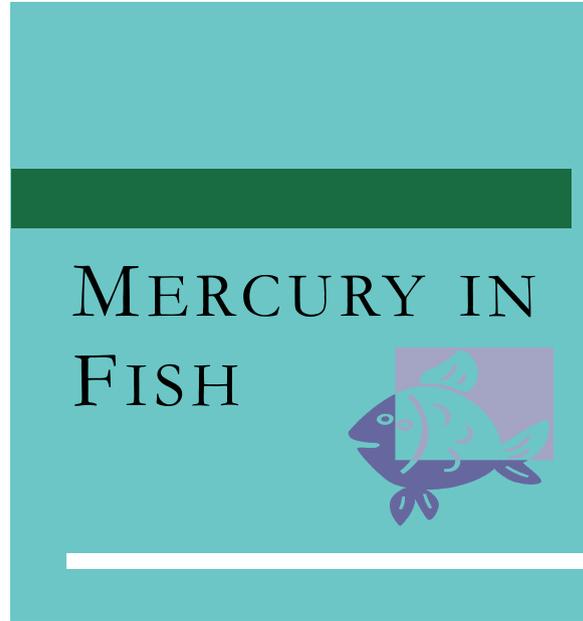




Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
 For more information, call OEHHA at:
 916-327-7320 or 510-622-3170
www.oehha.ca.gov



THE PROBLEM YOU CAN'T
 SEE, SMELL, OR TASTE

FISHING IS FUN

FISH ARE GOOD
 FOR YOU

BUT... THERE IS
 MERCURY IN FISH

YOU CAN CONTINUE
 TO FISH AND EAT
 FISH BY FOLLOWING
 THE EASY TIPS IN
 THIS BROCHURE



Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment

My Fish Look Fine — What is the Problem?

All fish contain some mercury. You can't see it, smell it, or taste it. Special tests can measure it. Mercury can harm our health if we get too much of it in our bodies.

What is Mercury?

Mercury is a natural element that is found in rock and soil. It gets into the air when soil decays or rocks break down. Even though mercury is a natural material, human activities add to the problem of mercury in the environment.

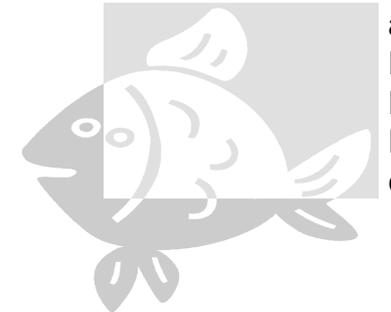
Mercury becomes airborne when large amounts of coal, oil, or natural gas are burned, or when mercury-containing products (including fluorescent light bulbs, mercury thermometers, and thermostats) are burned or dumped instead of recycled. Once mercury is in the air, it falls back down in rain and snow, and some runs off into bodies of water. Mining has also released a lot of mercury that ends up in water.

How Does Mercury Get in Fish?

Once it gets into water, mercury settles in the sand or mud where some of it changes into a more toxic form called "methylmercury." This form of mercury passes into tiny animals and the fish that eat them. When big fish eat the small fish, the levels of methylmercury move up the food chain and build up in the fish.

Which Fish Have the Most Mercury?

Larger, older fish tend to have more mercury than younger fish. Fish that eat other fish have the most mercury in their flesh. In the ocean, these are sharks and swordfish. In lakes, rivers, and reservoirs, bass generally have the highest levels of mercury.



What are the Health Effects of Methylmercury?

In large amounts, methylmercury can damage the brain while it is growing. Pregnant mothers' unborn babies, nursing infants, and children are most sensitive. Too much methylmercury may affect their behavior and how they learn.

Mothers can pass methylmercury to their babies during pregnancy and breastfeeding. So, women in their childbearing years should be most careful to choose fish wisely.

Methylmercury can also harm adults. But it is not likely to harm you if you eat fish in moderation.

What Can I Do?

It is not necessary to stop eating fish. In fact, fish are very important in the diet. They provide protein and important fats called "omega-3 fatty acids" that help keep you healthy.

If you stop eating high-mercury fish, the chemical will slowly leave your body.

Use the information in this brochure to help guide your safe fish consumption.



WOMEN OF CHILDBEARING AGE AND CHILDREN

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommend that women who are pregnant or might become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children:

- Do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel, or Tilefish
- Eat up to 12 ounces (2 average meals) a week of a **variety** of fish and shellfish lower in mercury, such as shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and (farmed) catfish.
- Albacore ("white") tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna, so you may eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna per week.

ALL OTHER ADULTS

Remember: Fish are an important part of a healthy diet. The American Heart Association recommends two meals of fish a week. Choose fish lower in mercury. If you eat fish from local water bodies without an advisory, you may eat up to 12 meals a month.

IF YOU EAT FISH THAT YOU, FRIENDS, OR FAMILY CATCH

Follow OEHHA's advice for sport-caught fish from local water bodies. Check the California Department of Fish and Game's Sport Fishing Regulations booklet; contact OEHHA at the numbers listed on the back of this brochure; or look for OEHHA's advisories at: www.oehha.ca.gov/fish.html.

If there is no advisory for the places you fish, women in their childbearing years and children may eat up to one meal a week of fish caught from local waters, and should not eat other fish the same week.

Easy tips to choose your fish wisely!

- ◆ Eat a variety of fish and shellfish.
- ◆ Choose fish lower in mercury like wild salmon, trout, tilapia, cod, sole, sardines, shrimp, and other shellfish.
- ◆ Limit the amount you eat of large predators like shark, swordfish, and large ocean tuna used to make tuna steaks.
- ◆ Women in their childbearing years and children should avoid eating these large predators.
- ◆ Eat other types of fish in moderation like halibut, snapper, "light" canned tuna, and most fish from the grocery store.
- ◆ Eat only the fillet or "meat" of the fish.

What Else Can I Do To Protect My Family and Reduce Mercury Pollution?

- ▶ Call **1-800-CLEANUP** for more information on recycling mercury-containing household products, such as thermometers, batteries, and fluorescent light bulbs, at your local household hazardous waste facility. Or visit: www.earth911.org
- ▶ For more information on mercury and its health effects, how to handle spills, and to learn what U.S. EPA is doing to reduce mercury emissions, visit: www.epa.gov/earlink1/mercury/index.htm

