



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



FDA and EPA Announce the Revised Consumer Advisory on
Methylmercury in Fish

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced today their joint consumer advisory on methylmercury in fish and shellfish for reducing the exposure to high levels of mercury in women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children. This unifies advice from both FDA and EPA and supercedes FDA's and EPA's 2001 advisories.

The FDA and EPA want to emphasize the benefits of eating fish - consumers should know that fish and shellfish can be important parts of a healthy and balanced diet. They are good sources of high quality protein and other essential nutrients; however, as a matter of prudence, women might wish to modify the amount and type of fish they consume if they are planning to become pregnant, pregnant, nursing, or feeding a young child. By following these three recommendations for selecting and eating fish or shellfish, women will receive the benefits of eating fish and shellfish and be confident that they have reduced their exposure to the harmful effects of mercury.

1. Do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel, or Tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.
2. Eat up to 12 ounces (two average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.
 - Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish.
 - Another commonly eaten fish, albacore ("white") tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna. So, when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish, you may eat up to six ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna per week.
3. Check local advisories about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in your local lakes, rivers and coastal areas. If no advice is available, eat up to six ounces (one average meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, but don't consume any other fish during that week.

Follow these same recommendations when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but serve smaller portions

"This revised advisory is a culmination of months of hard work by both agencies," said FDA Deputy Commissioner, Lester M. Crawford, D.V.M., Ph.D. "By following this advice, we're confident that women and young children can safely include fish as an important part of a healthy diet."

In July 2002, FDA's Food Advisory Committee met and made several recommendations to FDA on how to revise its 2001 consumer advisory on methylmercury in fish with special concern for pregnant women, nursing mothers, women who may become pregnant, and young children. One recommendation was for FDA and EPA to coordinate mercury advisories on commercial fish and recreational fish and say something specific about canned tuna.

In December 2003, FDA's Food Advisory Committee met again to be updated on the progress FDA had made in responding to their recommendations. At that time the committee recommended listing in the advisory fish that are low in mercury. Since the December 2003 meeting and the period of time between the two meetings, FDA and EPA have been working together toward the goal of providing an updated consumer advisory in response to the recommendations from the Food Advisory Committee. This work has included conducting ongoing interagency meetings; conducting field assignments which provided additional testing of mercury in fish for which there were low sample sizes; sampling over 3400 cans of tuna; undertaking exposure assessments using these new data; and conducting focus group testing on the revised advisory.

"Our guidance allows consumers to make educated dietary choices for fish they catch or buy," said EPA's Acting Assistant Administrator for the Office of Water Benjamin Grumbles. "With a few simple adjustments, consumers can continue to enjoy these foods in a manner that is healthy and beneficial."

As part of announcing the revised consumer advisory, FDA and EPA plan to launch a comprehensive outreach and educational campaign.

For more information call FDA at 301-436-2335 or EPA at 202-564-4355. Additional information can be found at:

www.cfsan.fda.gov or the EPA website at **www.epa.gov/ost/fish**