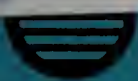


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January 1997

# Lake Michigan Fish Advisory

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A Guide to  
Your Health



*A sport fish consumption  
guide to the Illinois waters  
of Lake Michigan*

Illinois Fish Contaminant Monitoring Program

# A Guide to Your Health

*Fish are nutritious and good to eat. But some fish may take in contaminants from the water they live in and the food they eat. Some of these contaminants build up in the fish - and in you - over time. These contaminants could harm the people who eat them, so it is important to keep your exposure to these contaminants as low as possible. This advisory helps you plan what fish to keep as well as how much sport fish to eat. This advisory is not intended to discourage you from eating fish, but should be used as a guide to eating fish low in contaminants.*

## Health Benefits

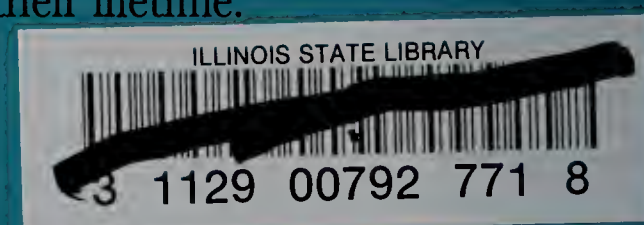
When properly prepared, fish provide a diet high in protein and low in saturated fats. Many doctors suggest that eating a half pound of fish each week is helpful in preventing heart disease. Almost any kind of fish may have real health benefits when it replaces a high-fat source of protein in the diet. You can get the health benefits of fish and reduce unwanted contaminants by following this advisory.

## Contaminants in Fish

Long-lasting contaminants such as PCBs, DDT, and mercury build up in fish in amounts which are a health concern. Health problems which may result from the contaminants found in fish range from small changes in health that are hard to detect to birth defects and cancer. Women who eat highly contaminated fish for many years before becoming pregnant may have children who are slower to develop and learn. The meal advice in this advisory is intended to protect children from these potential developmental problems. Adults are less

likely to have health problems at the same low levels of exposure that affect children, so the meal advice contained in this advisory may be overprotective for women beyond child-bearing age and adult men.

Although this advisory is primarily based on effects other than cancer, some contaminants cause cancer in animals. Your risk of cancer from eating contaminated fish cannot be predicted with certainty. Cancer currently affects about one in every three people by the age of 70, primarily due to smoking, diet, and hereditary risk factors. Exposure to contaminants in the fish you eat may not increase your cancer risk at all. If you follow this advisory over your lifetime, you will minimize your exposure and reduce whatever cancer risk is associated with contaminants. At worst, using Environmental Protection Agency methods to calculate risk, it is estimated that approximately one additional cancer case may develop in 10,000 people who eat fish according to this advisory over their lifetime.



# U S I N G T H I S A D V I S O R Y

Measure your fish from the tip of the nose to the end of the tail. Find the species and size of fish caught in the table that follows. The table shows each kind of fish which has been tested for contaminants. If a species is not listed, it has not been tested. At the top of the table, find the meal advice for the size fish caught.

- **No Restriction** means you can eat as many meals as you like
- **One Meal a Week** (52 meals per year), **One Meal a Month** (12 meals per year), and **One Meal Every Two Months** (6 meals per year) is advice for how long to wait before eating your next meal of sport fish.
- **Do Not Eat** means no one should eat those fish because of very high contamination.

Fish Species	No Restriction	One Meal per Week	One Meal per Month	One Meal Every Two Months	Do Not Eat
Chinook Salmon			<30"	>30"	
Coho Salmon			All Sizes		
Lake Whitefish		<19"	19" - 25"	>25"	
Rainbow Trout		<17"	>17"		
Brown Trout			<22"	>22"	
Lake Trout			<23"	23" - 27"	>27"
Yellow Perch		All sizes			
Smelt*		All sizes			
Channel Catfish					All sizes
Carp					All sizes

< means **less than** the length shown; > means **greater than** the length shown. "All sizes" means fish of any length.

\* Advice for smelt is for untrimmed fish cooked with the skin on.

Note that the amount of contaminants in a fish listed in the "One Meal a Month" group is four times higher than the contaminants in a fish listed in the "One Meal a Week" group.

## Eating Sport Fish from Lake Michigan

### The meal advice that follows is for eating trimmed and skinned fish\*

One meal is assumed to be one-half pound of fish (weight before cooking) for a 150 pound person. This meal advice is equally protective for larger people who eat larger meals and smaller people who eat smaller meals. Follow the cleaning and cooking directions to prepare fish.

**Special Risk Groups:** People who regularly eat sport fish, women of childbearing age, and children under six years of age are particularly susceptible to contaminants that build up over time. If you fall into one of these categories, you should be especially careful to space fish meals out according to the advisory table that follows. Your body can get rid of some contaminants, such as mercury, over time. Spacing the meals out helps prevent the contaminants from building up to harmful levels in the body. For example, if you eat a fish from the "One Meal a Month" group, wait a month before eating another meal of fish from any restricted category.

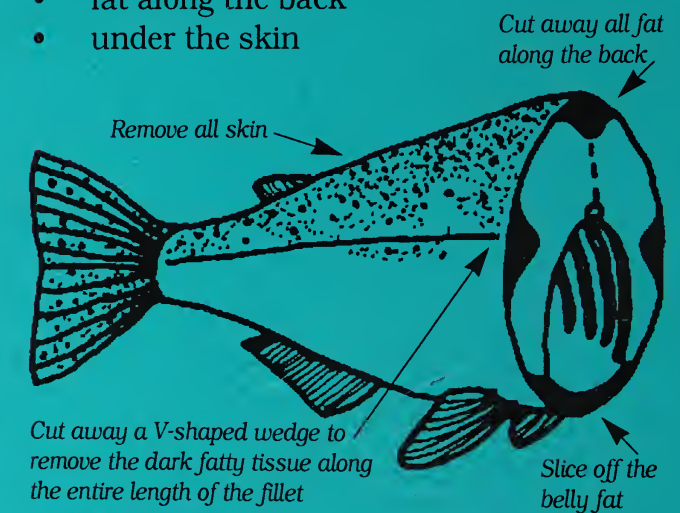
**Others:** Women beyond their childbearing years and men face fewer health risks from contaminants such as mercury and PCBs. However, if you are in this group you should also follow the advisory to reduce your total exposure to contaminants. For these groups, it is the total number of meals that you eat during the year that becomes important and many of those meals can be eaten during a few months of the year. If most of the fish you eat are from the "One Meal a Week" category, you should not exceed 52 meals per year. Likewise, if most of the fish you eat are in the "One Meal a Month" category, you should not exceed 12 meals per year. Remember, eating one meal of fish from the "One Meal a Month" group is comparable to eating four fish meals from the "One Meal a Week" group.

## Cleaning and Cooking

**IMPORTANT: You must follow these cleaning and cooking directions.**

Many contaminants are found at higher levels in the fat of fish. You can reduce the amount of these contaminants in a fish meal by properly trimming, skinning, and cooking your catch. Remove the skin and trim all the fat from the areas shown below:

- the belly flap
- the line along the sides of the fish
- fat along the back
- under the skin



Cooking does not destroy contaminants in fish, but heat from cooking melts some of the fat in fish and allows some of the contaminated fat to drip away. Broil, grill, or bake the trimmed, skinned fish on a rack so the fat drips away. Do not use the drippings to prepare broth, sauce, chowder, or soup.

These cleaning and cooking precautions will not reduce the amount of mercury or other metals. Mercury is distributed throughout a fish's muscle tissue (the part you eat) rather than in the fat or skin. Therefore, the only way to reduce mercury intake is to reduce the amount of contaminated fish you eat.

## For More Information

All fish that have been tested from Illinois lakes and rivers are listed in the current Illinois Fishing Information booklet published by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Call 217/782-6424 to request a free copy or write:

Fish Advisory  
Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Fisheries  
600 North Grand Avenue West  
Springfield, IL 62702

For questions concerning the sources of contaminants in Illinois' environment, call the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency at 217/782-3362

For questions concerning collecting and testing fish, call the Illinois Department of Natural Resources at 217/782-6424.

Special thanks to the Great Lakes Sport Fish Advisory Task Force, Council of Great Lakes Governors for information used in this advisory, and to Jim Amrhein at Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for use of the drawings.

*The Illinois Fish Contaminant Monitoring Program is a cooperative effort between the Illinois Departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Nuclear Safety, Public Health, and the Environmental Protection Agency.*

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