

Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass Fish Consumption Advisory

DOH 334-289 June 2003



What IS the contaminant of concern in bass?

Mercury is the key contaminant of concern that has been found in some fish in Washington lakes in a 20-lake study.

Where does mercury come from?

Mercury occurs naturally and can be released from rocks and volcanoes and deposited globally by winds and rain. When deposited in water, it changes to an organic form that can bio-accumulate in fish and humans.

What are the health risks?

Mercury can affect the development of the nervous system, which can result in learning disabilities in children. In adults it can also affect the heart and the immune and reproductive systems.

Who is at risk?

Children are the most at risk for the effects of these contaminants. Pregnant women, those who are breast-feeding or who are planning a future pregnancy may pass these contaminants to their children. High fish consumers are a group that is also susceptible.

What is the Bass Statewide Fish Advisory?

In June 2003, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) issued a statewide fish consumption advisory for smallmouth and largemouth bass. *Women and children should limit their consumption of these two freshwater bass species to no more than 2 meals per month.*

What is a Fish Consumption Advisory?

Fish advisories inform the public that elevated concentrations of chemical contaminants have been found in certain species of local fish in specific waterbodies. They are designed to advise certain groups of people, such as children and women of childbearing age, to limit the amount of these fish that they eat. Washington state Department of Health, the local health districts and the Native American Nations of Washington have the primary responsibility for advising residents about the health risks of consuming contaminated, non-commercially caught fish.

How can you reduce the risk to you and your family?

There are several ways you can reduce your risk:

- Women and children should limit the amount of freshwater bass they eat to no more than 2 meals/month.
- Eat a variety of fish each week.
- Try to select smaller fish, as it is the larger fish that usually contain more contaminants.
- With other fish, remove the skin of fish, and bake or grill fish fillets to let the fat drip.
- Continue to eat fish... it is good for you!

Why is DOH making these recommendations?

DOH is concerned about providing advice that will help you protect your health. The advisory is based on results from a survey done by the WA Department of Ecology of 20 Washington lakes and rivers. This study indicated that more than half of the water bodies tested contained bass that contain mercury at levels of concern.

Washington State Department of Health
1-877-485-7316
www.doh.wa.gov/fish

For people with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TDD/TTY 711).