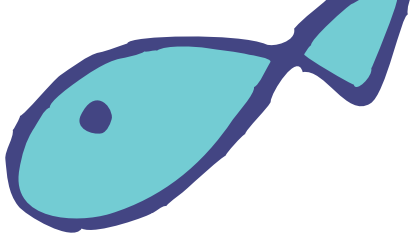


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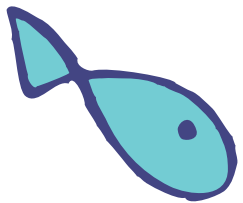


Expectant


Mother's

Guide to

Eating



Illinois Fish



Fish are a healthy, low-fat source of protein, but some Illinois fish contain harmful contaminants. This is a special concern if you are pregnant, planning to be pregnant or nursing a baby. You cannot tell if a fish is contaminated by looking at, smelling or tasting it. It is important to know which fish are healthy to eat and how to cook fish to reduce exposure to contamination.


How do I know which fish are contaminated?




Illinois agencies develop annual fish advisories. They list different fish found in various bodies of water that may be contaminated. The advisories tell which fish should be eaten in limited quantities and which fish should be avoided. If you eat fish caught in Illinois lakes and rivers, it is important to have a copy of the most recent fish advisory. This will help you to avoid contaminated fish. Copies are available wherever fishing licenses are sold (bait shops, sporting goods stores, etc.) or by calling the Illinois Department of Natural Resources at 800-275-3474.


What contaminants are in Illinois fish?

The three most common contaminants in Illinois fish are polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), chlordane and mercury.



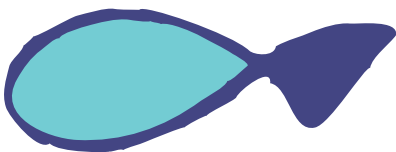
PCBs are man-made oils that were used in many industrial processes and products. They are no longer used in the U.S. but are still present in the environment. Since PCBs break down very slowly, they will be in the environment for many years.

 Chlordane is a man-made chemical that was used as an agricultural pesticide and to control termites in homes. It is no longer approved for use in the U.S., but it can remain in the environment for many years.

 Mercury is a metal that can be naturally occurring, but mainly comes from coal-burning power plants and from household and industrial waste. Once mercury gets in the environment, it stays there for a long time.

Not only are these contaminants slow to break down in the environment, they also can travel long distances and be found in soil and in water far from their original source. So, even if you live in an area where there is no immediate source of any of these contaminants, it is possible for them to be present.

PCBs, chlordane and mercury collect in soil, water and sediments. Fish that live and feed in waters that have been contaminated by these substances can accumulate the contaminants in their bodies. Over time, the amount of contaminants can build up in the fish. When we eat the fish, we are exposed to the contamination.



Where are the contaminants in fish?

Mercury is stored in the meat of fish. Chlordane and PCBs are stored in the fat of the fish. With careful preparation, there are ways to avoid eating the fat in fish.

How do fish contaminants affect me and my baby?

Over time, you can build up harmful levels of PCBs, chlordane and mercury in your body without knowing it. This is a special concern if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Each of these contaminants can be passed on to your baby and possibly cause problems in the baby's development. Mercury causes problems with the nervous system that can lead to learning difficulties. In animals, chlordane has caused behavioral effects in developing young; this may also happen in humans, but it has not been proven. PCBs are known to cause low birth weights and delays in physical development. PCBs also may cause learning difficulties and cancer, but this has not been proven in humans.




Even if you are not pregnant, reducing your exposure is important. It takes a long time for PCBs, chlordane and mercury to leave your body once you have been exposed. What you eat now can have effects several years later. For this reason, it is important to always

Reduce your exposure to fish contaminants

Choose where to fish

If the body of water you fish has an advisory, be careful about which fish you take home to eat. Practice catch and release for those fish that are contaminated. Another option is to choose a fishing area without an advisory on the type of fish you like to eat.

Choose the right fish

-  Avoid older or bigger fish. They have had more time to build up contaminants in their bodies.
-  Choose fish that do not eat other fish. Fish such as walleye and northern pike tend to have higher levels of mercury because they may eat other contaminated fish.
-  Avoid fish with a lot of fat. Fatty fish such as carp and catfish tend to collect more chlordane and PCBs in their fat.

Limit your consumption of contaminated fish when pregnant or breastfeeding

If you know the body of water you fish is contaminated, follow the advice by eating fewer meals containing contaminated fish. Substitute store-bought fish, fish from a less contaminated area or keep only those fish that are not listed in the advisory.



make changes in how you eat fish
(what kind, from where, how often)

prepare the fish to reduce contamination

Where can I get more information on how contaminants may affect my health?

Illinois Department of Public Health
Division of Environmental Health
525 W. Jefferson St.
Springfield, IL 62761
217-782-5830 or
Toll free 888-522-1282

Where can I get a copy of the most recent Illinois fish advisory?

Any place where fishing licenses are sold, such as bait shops or retail stores, or from the

Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Division of Fisheries Resources
800 North Grand Ave. E
Springfield, IL
800-ASK FISH
800-275-3474

Adapted from a publication developed by the Minnesota Department of Health

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