



Bulletin No. 17

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## Scombroid Fish Poisoning: First Case Reports in Alaska

Two recent episodes reported to the Epidemiology Unit raised the possibility of scombroid poisoning resulting from the consumption of fish caught in Alaska waters.

August 6th, 1982 an Anchorage woman reported that three days before, she and her husband had become ill about one-half hour after consuming a meal of marinated raw salmon. Illness consisted of generalized hives, a brassy taste, flushing, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting without diarrhea. Symptoms persisted for four hours.

August 12th, a Valdez physician informed our office that three days previous she had treated nine Japanese sailors for an illness which began one hour after eating a meal of mixed raw cod, flounder and salmon. Illness was said to have affected most of the 23 man crew, but only nine were seen by the doctor. She found tachycardia in two, hives in four, nausea in eight, and vomiting in two. No respiratory difficulty was noted. Treatment included emetics, antihistamines, and epinephrine. Symptoms resolved by morning and the crew left for Japan with a cargo of refrigerated raw fish. Through the Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia, the Japanese Ministry of Health was notified of the outbreak so they could continue the investigation when the vessel arrived in Japan.

The illness described here appears to be scombroid fish poisoning, which results from the ingestion of histamine-like substances formed when bacteria degrade the flesh of certain marine fish. While scombroid is an illness generally associated with warm water fish, and while it has not previously been described in Alaska, there are Japanese accounts of its association with polar species.

We urge anyone aware of people suffering toxic misadventures with raw fish to contact the Epidemiology Unit at 561-4406. Confirmation of diagnosis is dependent on finding high histamine levels in implicated fish.

(Reported by Kathleen Todd, M.D., Valdez)

### Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning at Mussel Beach

August 10th, five family members from Perryville on the Alaska Peninsula were air evacuated to the Alaska Native Medical Center, Anchorage, suffering from vomiting, weakness, tingling around the mouth, and slurred speech following the consumption of a meal of baked mussels from a nearby beach.

It was the quick thinking of one of those affected who recognized the symptoms of PSP and of the alternate Village Health Aide who administered ipecac which prevented further and more serious illness.

Perryville mussels gathered by the Department of Environmental Conservation and tested by the Section of Laboratories, Division of Public Health showed 5030 gms of toxin per 100 gms of meat. This is an extremely high level.

The absence of a red tide does not indicate that clams and mussels are free from paralytic shellfish toxin. The best advice remains avoidance. Vivian Kosbruk, Acting Village Health Aide, can speak for Perryville people on that.

(Contributed by Vivian Kosbruk, Acting Village Health Aide; Tom McWilliams, M.D.; David Barrett, M.D., Alaska Native Medical Center; Richard Peifer, Department of Environmental Conservation)