



Bulletin No. 6

June 15, 2001

Mercury and National Fish Advisories
Statement from Alaska Division of Public Health
Recommendations for Fish Consumption in Alaska

- The national fish advisories from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) issued January 25, 2001 were *general* advisories and were not based upon data on mercury levels in fish from Alaska. The FDA has acknowledged that mercury levels in Alaska fish are far below the average levels upon which the FDA issued their advisory. As a result, the FDA amended their original advisory, recommending that consumers contact local health or food safety authorities for specific consumption recommendations.
- The Alaska Division of Public Health has reviewed data on the levels of mercury in Alaska fish and humans. Fortunately, mercury levels are very low in the most frequently consumed fish from Alaska, such as salmon, cod, halibut, pollock, sole, and herring. Mercury levels in salmon are among the lowest found.
- Extensive scientific research has documented the numerous health, social and cultural, and economic benefits of eating fish.
- Eating fish provides inexpensive and readily available nutrients, vitamins, essential fatty acids, antioxidants, calories and protein that contribute to significant health benefits.
- Proven health benefits include protection from cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and improved maternal nutrition and neonatal and infant brain development.
- The subsistence lifestyle and diet are of great importance to the self-determination, cultural, spiritual, social, and overall health and well being of Alaska Natives.
- The known benefits of fish consumption far outweigh the theoretical and controversial potential adverse health effects from mercury found in Alaska fish.
- Substitution of other less healthy, less nutritious food for Alaska fish would result in far greater harm to health.
- The report, "Brain Food. What women should know about mercury contamination of fish," published by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (USPIRG) Education Fund and the Environmental Working Group, Washington, D.C., is NOT a credible source of health and dietary recommendations for Alaskans, and the Alaska Division of Public Health does NOT support its recommendations.
- The Alaska Division of Public Health continues to strongly recommend that all Alaskans, including pregnant women, women who are breast feeding, women of childbearing age, and young children continue unrestricted consumption of fish from Alaskan waters.
- An extensive collaborative program of research and monitoring of mercury in Alaska fish and in Alaskans who consume fish is needed and is being developed to increase the amount of data on mercury levels and follow trends in the future.

This statement has been endorsed by the following agencies and organizations:

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
Alaska Department of Health and Social Services
Alaska Native Health Board
Alaska Native Science Commission
Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association, Inc.
Institute for Circumpolar Health Studies, University of Alaska Anchorage
North Slope Borough
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation