

Progress Report on the Recommendations from the 2002 Food Advisory Committee Meeting

Following the 2002 – Food Advisory Committee there were six specific recommendations made in relation to the 2001 methylmercury advisory. Below is a brief summary of what has been undertaken by FDA in response to these six recommendations.

#1: better define what is meant by “eat a variety of fish” so that consumers can follow this recommendation effectively.

To address this issue we propose to simplify the language related to this section of the advisory. To this end the current draft revised advisory being tested in focus groups has reduced the variety question to a single statement as follows: You can safely eat up to 12 ounces (2-3 meals) of other fish and shellfish a week. Mix up the types of fish and shellfish you eat and do not eat the same types of fish and shell fish more than once a week.

#2: work with other federal and state agencies to bring commercial and recreational fish under the same umbrella,

Over the last nine months FDA has been working closely with EPA on this issue. We now have a joint advisory from FDA and EPA that addresses both commercial and recreational fish and shellfish.

#3: publish a quantitative exposure assessment used to develop the advisory recommendations,

An initial exposure assessment was undertaken earlier in 2003. This was peer reviewed and based on the peer review and new data on levels of mercury in fish the exposure assessment was revised. The revised assessment is currently being prepared for submission as a manuscript. The most recent exposure assessment will be presented at the Food Advisory Committee meeting in December 2003.

#4: develop specific recommendations for canned tuna, based on a detailed analysis of what contribution canned tuna makes to overall methylmercury levels in women,

Our data indicate that canned tuna is one of the most consumed commercial fish commodity in the United States. Data on mercury levels in canned tuna indicates that there are differences between white (or albacore) canned tuna and light canned tuna. White canned tuna has an average level of MeHg of around 0.36 ppm, compared with light canned tuna that has a level of around 0.12ppm. A statement that levels of mercury in tuna vary and that light tuna is generally lower than white or albacore tuna has been added to the draft revised advisory.

#5: address children more comprehensively in the advisory to relate dietary recommendations in the advisory to the age/size of the child,

The current FDA advisory does not address the age of children and neither we nor EPA feel that it is possible to do that with any accuracy. However, the EPA do note in their current (2001) advisory that children eat smaller portions. The revised draft advisory recommends that young children should eat less than that amount recommended for adults (12oz) because they are smaller.

#6: increase monitoring of methylmercury to include levels in fish and the use of human biomarkers.

FDA has undertaken an extensive testing program of canned tuna in the last six months. This has resulted in 119 light tuna samples and 170 white (albacore) tuna samples being tested from retail stores. FDA has just completed an assignment to test a variety of other fish comprising approximately 250 samples total from 12 different species.