

Protecting Health Through Information: The FDA/EPA Federal Advisory on Methylmercury in Fish

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Overview

- Information is a tool
- Targeted communication can change knowledge, attitudes, and behavior
- Effective information exchange can lead people toward making informed decisions to reduce their potential risk

Mercury Health Effects

- Highly toxic and biomagnifies
- Impaired neurological development (low doses)
 - Neurotoxic effects, especially in children who were exposed *in utero*, are well documented
- Impacts on cognitive functions
- Other health effects (high doses)
- NHANES 2002 data
 - 5.7% US women of childbearing age have mercury in blood above reference dose level

Regulations + Communication = Increased Public Protection

- Clean Water Act
 - Water Quality Criterion for the Protection of Human Health-Methylmercury
- Clean Air Act
 - Clean Air Mercury Rule
 - Clean Air Interstate Rule
- Implementing EPA's Mercury Roadmap
- Building on Voluntary Partnerships
- Pollution Prevention
- Information for informed risk management decisions

EPA's National Fish Advisory Program

- Technical assistance to state, federal and tribal agencies on health risks from contaminants in fish and wildlife
 - National guidance documents and outreach
 - National databases
 - Assistance in issuing advisories
 - National conferences and workshops
 - Grants for sampling and analysis
 - Conduct special studies
 - Issue advisories when needed

Fish Consumption Advisories

- A voluntary recommendation providing advice on which and how much fish can be safely consumed
- Can be targeted to specific waters or geographic areas
- Can be national in scope
- Typically issued by states after sampling fish from specific waters
- National Joint EPA/FDA Advice on Mercury in Fish

Basic Logic behind Fish Advisories

“Provide the general public with necessary information/knowledge about which fish are potentially contaminated to enable safer choices”

State and Federal Roles in Issuing Fish Advisories

- States and Tribes have primary responsibility for recreational and subsistence fish harvested from their waters
- FDA is primarily responsible for issuing advice on commercial fish
- EPA issues advice as a stopgap measure for untested waters

2004 FDA/EPA Joint National Mercury Fish Advisory

- In 2003, EPA and FDA met w/ FDA's Food Advisory Committee (FAC)
 - To ensure that advice provided adequate protection for pregnant women and women of childbearing age
 - FDA and EPA met with broad stakeholder groups to refine and tailor advice
 - Draft Advisory developed based on comments from all stakeholders
 - Focus Group tested Advisory

The Basic Message

- Do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel or Tilefish
- Eat up to 12 ounces (2 avg. meals) a week of fish/shellfish low in mercury
- Check local advisories about safety of fish caught locally

Outreach Program

- National Press Conference
- Calls with Stakeholder Groups
- National Outreach Campaign

Outreach Products for Diverse Audiences

AVAILABLE IN 8 LANGUAGES

	(English) What You Need to Know About Mercury in Fish and Shellfish	(Cambodian) អ្វីដែលអ្នកចាំបាច់ដើម្បីដឹងអំពីមេរ៊ីក្យូរីក្នុងត្រីនិងស្រទាប់ស្រទាប់ផ្សេងៗ	(Chinese) 鱼贝类 风险须知	(Hmong) Yam Koj Yuav Tsum Tau Paub Txog Ntawm Mercury hauv Nqaij Ntes thiab Qwj Ntes	(Korean) 어패류에 함유된 수은에 관한 모든 정보	(Vietnamese) Những Thông tin Cần biết về Thủy ngân có trong Cá và Tôm, Cua, Sò, Hến	(Spanish) Lo que Usted Necesita Saber Sobre el Mercurio en el Pescado y los Mariscos	(Portuguese) O Que Você Precisa Saber Sobre Mercúrio em Peixes e Frutos do Mar
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For Conference Purposes Only

Conflicting Messages



Conflicting Messages

- U.S. Tuna Foundation
- Fishcam
- Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies
- Washington Post

Measuring Success

- The National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey (NHANES)
 - Assessment of health and nutritional status of adults and children in the U.S.
 - By 2011, NHANES data would show:
 - reduction in % of women of childbearing age with mercury blood levels at level of concern
 - no decrease in consumption of fish and shellfish by women of childbearing age

Measuring Success

- Infant Feeding Practices Study
 - Designed by EPA/FDA to assess level of awareness of mercury as a problem
 - Association of mercury with seafood
 - Changes in seafood consumption
 - Consumer sources of diet info. during pregnancy

Measuring Success

- FDA Consumer Food Safety Survey
 - Awareness of health benefits/concerns from eating seafood
 - Knowledge of problematic seafood
 - Awareness of mercury in seafood
 - Knowledge of subgroups advised to limit seafood consumption

Next Steps

- Continue implementing the FDA/EPA Joint National Advisory Outreach Campaign
- Continue working with stakeholder groups to reduce public confusion resulting from conflicting messaging
- Continue strengthening the science foundation for public advice on mercury