



Health Health Disease
 ~Protection * Education * Prevention~

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Our Mission

“To assure the highest possible level of health for the people of the communities we serve.”

Inside this issue:

CDC Implements New Tiered Travel Health Guidance System	2
Michigan Department of Agriculture Pinpoints Causes of Foodborne Illness Outbreaks	3
Wellness Fun Facts	3
June is Food Safety Month/Mercury in Fish and Shellfish <i>(Cont. from front page)</i>	4

June is Food Safety Month/Mercury in Fish and Shellfish

Advice for Women Who Might Become Pregnant, or are Pregnant, Nursing Mothers and Young Children

By Richard J. Thoune, Director/Health Officer

The Environmental Protection Agency and Food and Drug Administration have issued advice for women who might become pregnant or are pregnant, nursing mothers and young children. We all know that fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet. Fish and shellfish contain high-quality protein and other essential nutrients, are low in saturated fat, and contain omega-3 fatty acids. A well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fish and shellfish can contribute to heart health and children's proper growth and development. So, women and young children in particular should include fish or shellfish in their diets due to the many nutritional benefits.

However, nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of mercury. For most people, the risk from mercury by eating fish and shellfish is not a health concern. Yet, some fish and shellfish contain higher levels of mercury that may harm an unborn baby or young child's developing nervous system. The risks from mercury in fish and shellfish depend on the amount of fish and shellfish eaten and the levels of mercury in the fish and shellfish. Therefore, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) are advising women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children to avoid some types of fish and eat fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.

By following these 3 recommendations for selecting and eating fish or shellfish, women and young children will receive the benefits of eating fish and shellfish and be confident that they have reduced their exposure to the harmful effects of mercury.

Do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel, or Tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.

Eat up to 12 ounces (2 average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.

Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish.

Another commonly eaten fish, albacore ("white") tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna. So, when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish, you may eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna per week.

Check the current Michigan Family Fish Consumption Guide about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in our local lakes, rivers, and coastal areas. If no advice is available, eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, but don't consume any other fish during that week.

Follow these same recommendations when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but serve smaller portions.

Frequently Asked Questions about Mercury in Fish and Shellfish:

"What is mercury and methylmercury?" Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and can also be released into the air through industrial pollution. Mercury falls from the air and can accumulate in streams and oceans and is turned into methylmercury in the water. It is this type of mercury that can be harmful to unborn babies and young children. Fish absorb the methylmercury as they feed in these waters and so it builds up in them. It builds up more in some types of fish and shellfish than others, depending on what the fish eat, which is why the levels vary.



"I'm a woman who could have children but I'm not pregnant - so why should I be concerned

about methylmercury?" If you regularly eat types of fish that are high in methylmercury, it can accumulate in your blood stream over time. Methylmercury is removed from the body naturally, but it may take over a year for the levels to drop significantly. Thus, it may be present in a woman even before she becomes pregnant. This is the reason why women who are trying to become pregnant should also avoid eating certain types of fish.

(Cont. on the back page)

CDC Implements New Tiered Travel Health Guidance System

Source: Michigan Health Alert Network

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) today implemented a new system for providing travelers with guidance about potential health hazards and the steps they can take to protect themselves when traveling abroad. The new system makes it easier for the public to understand what their risks may be during an emerging public health crisis and what they can do to protect themselves.

“As we learned during last year’s SARS outbreak, infectious diseases can spread quickly as people travel around the globe,” said CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding. “This new system allows us to provide travelers with very important, real-time information that will be easy for them to apply to protect their health.”

The new system is effective immediately and will replace the previous travel alerts and advisories. Guidance will be posted on the CDC Travelers’ Health web site as cases of disease occur and will include four levels:

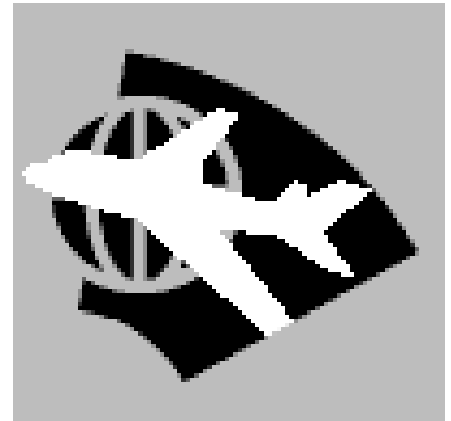
In The News: is the lowest level of notice and will provide information about sporadic cases of disease or an occurrence of a disease of public health significance

affecting a traveler or travel destination. The risk for an individual traveler does not differ from the usual risk in that area.

Outbreak Notice: provides information about a disease outbreak in a limited geographic area or setting. The risk to travelers is defined and limited, and the notice will remind travelers about standard or enhanced travel recommendations, such as vaccination.

Travel Health Precaution: provides specific information to travelers about a disease outbreak of greater scope and over a larger geographic area to reduce the risk of infection. The precaution also provides guidance to travelers about what to do if they become ill while in the area. CDC does not recommend against travel to a specific area, but may recommend limiting exposure to a defined setting, for example, poultry farms or health-care settings.

Travel Health Warning: recommends against nonessential travel to an area because a disease of public health concern is expanding outside of areas or populations that were initially affected. The purpose of a travel warning is to reduce



the volume of traffic to affected areas, limiting the risk of spreading the disease to unaffected areas.

CDC has broad authority under section 301 of the Public Health Service Act (42 USC 241) to make information available to the public regarding the causes, diagnosis, treatment, control, and prevention of physical and mental diseases and other impairments of man. CDC endeavors to provide accurate and credible health information and promote health through strong partnerships both at home and abroad.

A complete description of the definitions and criteria for issuing and removing travel notices can be found at www.cdc.gov/travel.

“We must commit ourselves to a lifestyle that promotes lifelong health. Preventive screenings, healthy eating, and exercise are vital steps we must take for good overall health.” - *Laura Bush*

Michigan Department of Agriculture Pinpoints Causes of Foodborne Illness Outbreaks

Source: Michigan Dept. of Community Health

Infected workers handling food with their bare hands is the most frequent cause of foodborne illness in Michigan. This conclusion comes from the "2003 Fiscal Year Summary, Foodborne Illness Surveillance" report just released by the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

During 2003, a total of 232 foodborne illness outbreaks involving 2,158 illnesses were reported to MDA. "We know from our research and from research by the National Centers for Disease Control that the number of reported foodborne illnesses represents only a small fraction of the total cases that occur," said Dan Wyant, Director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

The culprit *Noroviruses* was the most frequently identified agent involved in outbreaks in Michigan. Twenty-five outbreaks involving 937 persons were reported. These *Norovirus* outbreaks occurred because an infected worker handled food in an unsanitary manner. Other factors in Michigan foodborne illness outbreaks listed in order of frequency include:

- Insufficient time and/or temperature during hot holding
- Too slow cooling as with deep containers or large roasts
- Inadequate cold holding temperatures
- Preparing foods a half day or more before serving as in preparing a banquet a day in advance
- Insufficient time and/or temperature during initial cooking
- Raw product/ingredient contaminated by pathogen from an animal or environment
- Allowing foods to remain at room temperature for several hours

Wyant stressed that the suffering and economic loss associated with foodborne illness are preventable. Restaurants operators need to pay close attention to:

Employee health: Make certain employees understand the symptoms of illness that can be transmitted through food (diarrhea; fever; vomiting; jaundice; sore throat with fever; persistent cough; discharges from the eyes, nose, or mouth) and report those symptoms to the person in charge. Restrict or exclude ill employees from working with food, equipment, utensils, linens, and single service items as required by the Food Code. Remember that worker may continue to shed the virus after symptoms disappear.

Employee hygiene: Employees must wash their hands for at least 20 seconds after touching bare human body parts, using the toilet room, coughing, using a handkerchief, smoking, eating, drinking, handling soiled equipment/utensils, after switching between working with raw food and ready-to-eat food, and as often as necessary to remove soil and contamination. Employees should not handle ready-to-eat food with bare hands.

Food from Unsafe Sources: Obtain food from reputable suppliers. Thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables. Do not serve raw seed sprouts to highly susceptible populations.

Cooking: Thoroughly cook all foods of animal origin to minimum temperature requirements (Poultry and stuffed foods – 165 F for 15 seconds, injected/ground meats – 155 F for 15 seconds, other – 145 F for 15 seconds).

Cooling: To cool foods rapidly, use shallow pans; separate foods into smaller portions; use rapid cooling equipment; stir food in a container placed in an ice water bath; use containers that facilitate heat transfer; add ice as an ingredient; and use pre-chilled ingredients, etc. Cool potentially hazardous foods within 2 hours from 140 F to 70 F and within 4 hours from 70 F to 41 F.

Hot and Cold Holding: Reheat potentially hazardous food that has been cooked and cooled to a minimum temperature of 165 F. Hold hot at 140 F and above. Hold cold potentially hazardous food at 41 F and below.

Equipment and Utensils: Make certain that food contact surfaces are clean to sight and touch. Wash and sanitize the surface before each use with a different type of raw animal food (e.g. chicken then beef), after working with raw foods and before working with ready-to-eat foods, and anytime contamination may have occurred.

Wellness Fun Facts

Should a Person Take Salt Tablets in Hot Weather?

Do not take salt tablets unless directed by your doctor. Heavy sweating removes salt and minerals from the body. These are necessary for your body and must be replaced. The easiest and safest way to do this is through your diet. Drink fruit juice or a sports beverage when you exercise or work in the heat.

Source: "Extreme Heat," U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Estrogen-Alone Replacement No Effect on Heart Disease

A large, multi-center heart disease prevention study, part of the Women's Health Initiative, found that estrogen-alone hormone replacement therapy had no effect on heart disease risk and increased the risk of stroke for postmenopausal women. The study also found that estrogen-alone therapy greatly increased the risk of deep vein thrombosis.

Source: 4/13/04 news release, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

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trict Health Department

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(Cont. from front page)

"Is there methylmercury in all fish and shellfish?" Nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of methylmercury. However, larger fish that have lived longer have the highest levels of methylmercury because they've had more time to accumulate it. These large fish (swordfish, shark, king mackerel and tilefish) pose the greatest risk. Other types of fish and shellfish may be eaten in the amounts recommended by FDA and EPA.

"I don't see the fish I eat in the advisory. What should I do?" If you want more information about the levels in the various types of fish you eat, see the FDA food safety website www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/sea-mehg.html or the EPA website at www.epa.gov/ost/fish.

"What about fish sticks and fast food sandwiches?" Fish sticks and "fast-food" sandwiches are commonly made from fish that are low in mercury.

"The advice about canned tuna is in the advisory, but what's the advice about tuna steaks?" Because tuna steak generally contains higher levels of mercury than canned light tuna, when choosing your two meals of

fish and shellfish, you may eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of tuna steak per week.

"What if I eat more than the recommended amount of fish and shellfish in a week?" One week's consumption of fish does not change the level of methylmercury in the body much at all. If you eat a lot of fish one week, you can cut back for the next week or two. Just make sure you average the recommended amount per week.

"Where do I get information about the safety of fish caught recreationally by family or friends?" Before you go fishing, check the 2003 Michigan Family Fish Consumption Guide (http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,1607,7-132-2944_5327-13110--00.html) for information about recreationally caught fish. Checking local advisories is important because some kinds of fish and shellfish caught in local waters may have higher or much lower than average levels of mercury. This depends on the levels of mercury in the water in which the fish are caught. Those fish with much lower levels may be eaten more frequently and in larger amounts.

Enjoy the summer and Go Fishing!

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