Revised Joint FDA and EPA Advisory

David W K Acheson, FDA
James Pendergast, EPA

Current draft revised joint FDA and EPA advisory

Major points in response to the FAC recommendations:

1. The advisory covers both commercial and recreational fish and shell fish.
2. Advice directed toward the following:
   - Pregnant women
   - Women who may become pregnant
   - Nursing mothers
   - Young children

Major points in response to the FAC recommendations

3. The “Do Not Eat” list is unchanged (Shark, Swordfish, Tilefish, King Mackerel.

4. Advice on the amount (12 oz) of other fish remains the same. New language added regarding the recommendation to “mix up the types fish consumed”

Major points in response to the FAC recommendations

5. Advice on the amount of locally caught fish is the same as the 2001 EPA advice. Addition of new advice about not eating other fish in the same week as locally caught fish are consumed.

6. Addition of a series of Q and A on specific points

   New information on tuna added to the Q and A section:

   "Tuna is one of the most frequently consumed fish in the United States. Mercury levels in tuna vary. Tuna steaks and canned albacore tuna generally contain higher levels of mercury than canned light tuna. You can safely include tuna as part of your weekly fish consumption."

Title of Draft Joint Advisory:

ADVICE FOR WOMEN WHO ARE PREGNANT, OR WHO MIGHT BECOME PREGNANT, AND NURSING MOTHERS, ABOUT AVOIDING HARM TO YOUR BABY OR YOUNG CHILD FROM MERCURY IN FISH AND SHELLFISH.

Draft Joint Advisory has three main elements

Risk Message

Consumer Advice

Additional Information

Risk Message

Who is at risk

WOMEN WHO ARE PREGNANT, OR WHO MIGHT BECOME PREGNANT, NURSING MOTHERS, AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Risk Message

(continued)

Why they are at risk

Fish and shellfish can be an important part of a balanced diet. It is a good source of high quality protein and other nutrients and is low in fat. The FDA and EPA are advising pregnant women and nursing mothers to eat the types and amounts of fish and shellfish that are safe to prevent harm to the development of their baby or young child.

Consumer advice

Benefits and risk

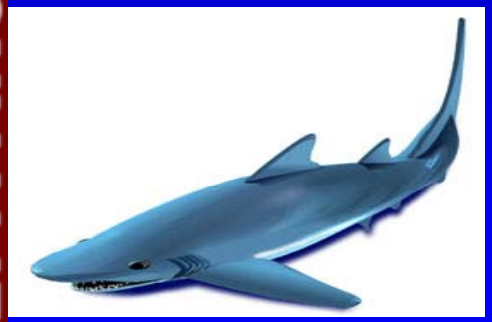
If you follow advice given by FDA and EPA you will gain the positive benefits of eating fish but avoid any developmental problems from mercury in fish.

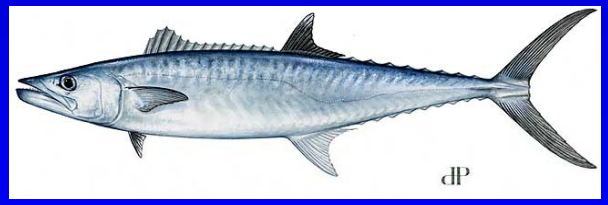
Consumer advice

How much fish?

To protect your baby follow these 3 rules:

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





Consumer advice

(continued)

How much fish?

To protect your baby follow these 3 rules *(cont'd):*

2. Levels of mercury in other fish can vary. You can safely eat up to 12 ounces (2 to 3 meals) of other purchased fish and shellfish a week. Mix up the types of fish and shellfish you eat and do not eat the same type of fish and shellfish more than once a week.

Consumer advice

(continued)

How much fish?

To protect your baby follow these 3 rules *(cont'd):*

3. Check local advisories about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in your local rivers and streams. If no advice is available, you can safely eat up to 6 ounces (one meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, but don't consume any other fish during that week.

Consumer advice

(continued)

How much fish

Follow these same rules when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but the serving sizes should be smaller.

Additional Information

1. But I thought fish was good for me when I am pregnant?

   It is, fish and other seafood long have been considered to be good sources of protein with the added advantage of being low in saturated fat and high in healthy omega-3 fatty acids. However, scientists have learned that shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish contain levels of mercury in them that may harm your unborn child. This is why FDA and EPA are advising you to avoid these fish. By eating other types of fish in moderation you will get the health benefits of fish.

Additional Information

2. What about tuna?

Tuna is one of the most frequently consumed fish in the United States. Mercury levels in tuna vary. Tuna steaks and canned albacore tuna generally contain higher levels of mercury than canned light tuna. You can safely include tuna as part of your weekly fish consumption.

Additional Information

3. Is there methylmercury in all fish?

   Nearly all fish 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 to pregnant women. Other types of fish are safe to eat in the amounts recommended by FDA and EPA If you want more information about the levels in various types of fish see the FDA food safety web site. www.cfsan.fda.gov or the EPA website at www.epa.gov/ost/fish.

Additional Information

4. 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 one of the reasons why women who are trying to become pregnant should also avoid eating certain types of fish. **Note:** If you have questions or think you've been exposed to large amounts of methylmercury, see your doctor or health care provider immediately.

Additional Information

5. Why do I need to get local advice for locally caught fish?

   Some kinds of fish and shellfish caught in your 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 lower levels may be safely eaten more frequently and in larger amounts.

Additional Information

6. How can learn about local advisories?

   Before you go fishing, check your Fishing Regulations Booklet for information about local advisories. You can also contact your local health department for information about local advisories. See below for state and tribal contact information.

   Note: If you have questions or think you've been exposed to large amounts of methylmercury, see your doctor or health care provider immediately.

Additional Information

7. What is mercury?

   Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and can also be released into the air through industrial pollution. It 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 is harmful to your baby. Fish absorb the methylmercury as they feed in these waters and so it may build up in the fish. It builds up more in some types of fish than others, depending on what the fish eat, which is why the levels in the fish vary.

Additional Information

- For further information about the risks of mercury in fish and shellfish call the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's food information line toll-free at 1-888-SAFEFOOD or visit FDA's Food Safety Website www.cfsan.fda.gov

- For further information about the safety of locally caught fish and shellfish, visit the Environmental Protection Agency's Fish Advisory website www.epa.gov/ost/fish or contact your State or Local Health Department. A list of state or local health department contacts is available at www.epa.gov/ost/fish. Click on Federal, State, and Tribal Contacts.

Milestones and Timeline

Tasks	Dates
Meetings with Stakeholder Groups and Federal Agencies	July 30, 2003
Conduct Focus Groups	November 2003
Meet With Food Advisory Committee	December 2003
Hold National Forum on Contaminants in Fish	January 2004
Targeted Release of Advisory	February 2004
Implement Advisory	Throughout 2004