

Fish consumption advisories for freshwater anglers

Florida's freshwater and marine fishes are generally considered safe to eat. Fish is an excellent source of protein and nutrients. The American Heart Association recommends eating fish at least twice a week to help maintain cardiovascular health. However, certain fish can be potentially unhealthy to eat, because they can take up contaminants from the water and from the food they eat.

At low to moderate levels found in most Florida fish, mercury poses little danger, and fish can be consumed safely in reasonable amounts. However, developing fetuses and young children are more sensitive to the harmful effects mercury has on the brain than adults. As a result, women of childbearing age and young children should eat less fish than others to avoid higher health risks.

By choosing a variety of fish low in mercury from different water bodies and not eating only one type, anglers can enjoy health benefits without appreciable risks. Consumption advisories have been issued to help anglers choose fish lower in mercury while limiting consumption of some species of fish from certain waters.

Count all fish meals from all water bodies

Fish eaten from different water bodies count toward the consumption guidelines. For example, a woman of childbearing age should not eat more than six ounces of cooked largemouth bass, combined, from all water bodies per month. Any additional fish meals eaten during the recommended time period should have low or no mercury levels.

Other department of health fish consumption advisories

Lake Apopka (Lake and Orange counties): brown bullhead should not be eaten due to pesticide contamination.

Lake Munson (Leon County): Largemouth bass 19 inches or more should not be eaten more than one time per month due to PCBs.

Mercury questions and answers

Where does mercury come from?

Mercury is released into the environment from natural deposits in rocks, volcanoes and soils. It is also released into the environment when power plants burn coal, incinerators burn mercury-containing wastes, and during production of other industrial chemicals. Air-borne mercury attaches itself to dust and water particles and enters Florida waters with rain and runoff.

How does mercury get into fish?

Mercury is found in virtually all waters in the state, usually at extremely low concentrations. Naturally occurring bacteria, which decompose dead plant and animal material in lakes and wetlands, convert mercury into a form called methyl mercury. Methyl mercury accumulates primarily from organisms eaten by fish. Fish may contain different levels of contaminants based on their location, size, age, and feeding habits.

Can I trim or cook fish to get rid of mercury?

No. Mercury accumulates in the muscle tissue of fish, the part you eat. Therefore, trimming excess fat and skinning do not reduce the amount of mercury you consume. The only way to reduce mercury consumption is to eat fish from less contaminated water bodies and to select species that are lower in mercury.

How do I choose which fish to eat?

Small, short-lived species such as sunfish (e.g., bluegill, redear sunfish, redbreast sunfish, or spotted sunfish) and brown bullhead are generally lower in mercury. Generally, smaller largemouth bass contain less mercury than larger individuals. To help you select fish to eat, refer to the Safe Eating Guidelines, below, for statewide advice from untested waters. If you don't see your favorite sport fish or for recommendations for tested waters, please consult the

"Your Guide To Eating Fish Caught In Florida"

Fish and shellfish have been tested for mercury in many Florida waters. For these, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) Web site offers specific consumption advice: doh.state.fl.us/floridafishadvice or call DOH at (850) 245-4299.

In a few locations, some species have high mercury levels and should not be eaten, while others are recommended for limited consumption (one meal per week or one meal per month).

publication "Your Guide to Eating Fish Caught in Florida" available at doh.state.fl.us/floridafishadvice/ or by calling (850) 245-4299.

EPA/FDA advice for women of childbearing age and young children

Women of childbearing age and children are more sensitive to mercury, and should take special precautions. Guidelines have been established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to protect this segment of the population. Please refer to the EPA Fish Advisories Web page for additional information: epa.gov/waterscience/fish/. EPA, along with FDA, recommend that when selecting and eating fish, women and young children reduce their exposure to the harmful effects of mercury by following these recommendations.

1. Do not eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel, or tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.
2. Eat up to 12 ounces (two average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury, such as shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish. 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 of albacore.
3. Check Florida Safe Eating Guidelines about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in Florida lakes, rivers, and coastal areas. The Florida statewide consumption advisory provides general guidelines for consumption of largemouth bass, bowfin and gar. For other fish from local water bodies that are not listed, consume no more than 6 ounces per week.

For more information

Check the FWC Web site: research.MyFWC.com/Mercury, or doh.state.fl.us/floridafishadvice/.

Safe eating guidelines

These Safe Eating Guidelines provide general advice to anglers from all untested waterbodies in the state. See pages 16–17 for fish identification illustrations.

For additional species information and for specific guidance for all tested marine and fresh waters, consult the Florida Department of Health publication *Your Guide to Eating Fish Caught in Florida* [See: doh.state.fl.us/floridafishadvice/ or call (850) 245-4299].

MODERATE GUIDELINES generally apply to these species.

- Limits for women of childbearing age and young children are: **one** 6-oz meal per week.
- For everyone else: **two** 6-oz meals per week.

STRICTER GUIDELINES generally apply to these species.

- Limits for women of childbearing age and young children are: **one** 6-oz meal per month.
- For everyone else: **one** 6-oz meal per week.