

Fish Consumption Advisories

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Are fish caught in Arizona waters healthy to eat?

Yes, when you follow Arizona's fish consumption guidelines. The most common pollutant found in fish in United States waters is mercury. To protect the health of everyone who wants to enjoy eating fish caught in Arizona waters, the State of Arizona issues fish consumption advisories for mercury. These advisories recommend healthy amounts of affected fish to eat and let the public know about possible adverse health effects from eating more than the recommended amount of these fish on a regular basis during a lifetime.

Fish are part of a healthy diet and are a good source of low-fat protein. You can lower potential health risks from eating fish containing mercury by following fish consumption advice. You also can lower the amount of pollutants you consume and increase healthful benefits by eating smaller, younger fish or fish types, such as trout or bluegill, which contain less mercury.

Is it healthy to swim or wade in lakes with fish consumption advisories?

Yes. Fish consumption advisories have no effect on recreational uses by people and domestic animals. In aquatic ecosystems, such as lakes and streams, where fish consumption advisories are in effect, only tiny amounts of the pollutants found in the fish are in the water. These pollutants are contained in the organisms inhabiting that ecosystem, which leaves extremely small amounts in the water.

Is it OK to fish in lakes with fish consumption advisories?

Yes. Children and adults of all ages can enjoy fishing and recreational water uses, including swimming, without risk.

Where does mercury in fish come from?

Mercury is an element common in nature and is naturally occurring in rock, soil and water. In Arizona, abandoned mines that were established prior to the development of modern mining practices can be major contributors to mercury in the environment.

Mercury is also released when fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) are burned; when municipal solid waste or medical waste is incinerated; during forest fires; and during some industrial and manufacturing processes, including some related to mining activities. Mercury in lakes is common throughout the United States and can be deposited in bodies of water far from the source through atmospheric deposition, meaning tiny particles of mercury settle out of the air and into the water or are deposited through rain- and snowfall.

Aquatic bacteria convert mercury into methylmercury, which is toxic. The compound methylmercury can then enter the food chain of the water body as organisms consume it and larger fish consume those organisms or smaller fish. Mercury accumulates in fish because it binds to muscle or fat with levels building up in the tissue over time. This process is known as bioaccumulation.

What is ADEQ doing about mercury in the environment?

ADEQ collects and analyzes data and conducts research to determine mercury sources in Arizona and develop feasible methods to lower mercury levels. Long-term strategies at the state and federal levels include reducing mercury in consumer products, encouraging development of new or alternative technologies and facilitating proper disposal of mercury-containing products.

Reducing mercury contamination is a collaborative effort among state and federal agencies including the Arizona Game & Fish Department, Arizona Department of Health Services, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Geological Survey, land managers and other public and private groups.

Is there a national mercury fish consumption advisory?

Yes. In January 2001, EPA issued a nationwide freshwater fish mercury advisory for potential risks to women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children. EPA recommends that these sensitive adults eat only one meal per week of 6 ounces of cooked fish (8 ounces uncooked) and young children eat no more than 2 ounces of cooked fish (3 ounces uncooked) per week. For information about potential health risks from eating fish bought commercially, please refer to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration companion advisory online at <http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm393070.htm>

Arizona's mercury fish consumption advisories are based on the risk associated with eating of fish from rivers, lakes and reservoirs throughout the state. The advisories and recommended consumption are based on the same risk analysis methods EPA used for its national mercury advisory.

For a list of current fish consumption advisories for Arizona waters visit azgfd.com/fishing/fishconsumption or azdeq.gov/FishAdvisories

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