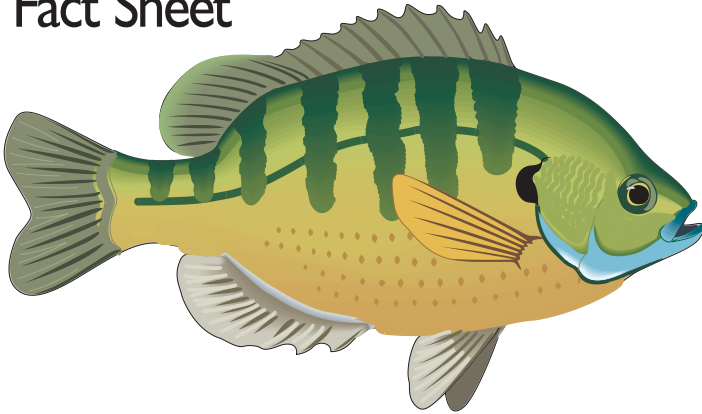


LAND & WATER

2/15/2005

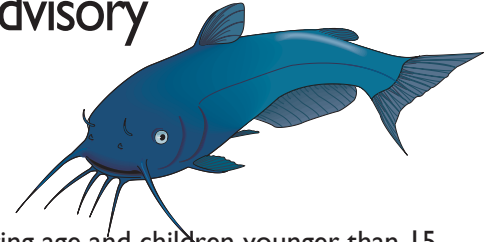
DEQ Fish Consumption Guidance Mercury Advisory Fact Sheet



In 2004, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a national fish consumption advisory for mercury that recommends that women of child-bearing age and young children eat no more than one meal per week of locally caught fish. EPA indicated that state or locally issued fish consumption advisories may be more or less restrictive based on specific local information. EPA's fish advisory for mercury can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish/> or you can receive a copy by calling the DEQ at 1-800-869-1400.

As the state agency responsible for issuing fish consumption advisories, the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is issuing a statewide fish consumption advisory for mercury in fish. This fish consumption advisory does not mean Oklahoma fish are unsafe to eat, but simply provides guidelines for the public to make informed choices about their health and diet. The advisory identifies species of fish that should be eaten in limited quantities by sensitive populations. This guidance does not apply to bottom-dwelling or bottom-feeding fish based on state data.

Today's guidance concerns the consumption of fish caught in Oklahoma's lakes and streams and is prompted by concerns over levels of mercury in fish that may pose a health risk to some individuals. In order to protect the most sensitive populations, pregnant or nursing women,



women of childbearing age and children younger than 15 years of age are advised to eat no more than one meal per week of predator fish. Since women beyond child-bearing age and males older than 15 years of age are at less risk for the effects of mercury, these groups may continue to eat a variety of fish, including predators, as part of a healthy diet. DEQ's recommendation is based on the evaluation of limited data concerning mercury in fish flesh and applies to fish caught in waters statewide. This advisory is similar to EPA's in that it recommends one meal per week of locally caught predator fish, but differs in that the recommendation applies only to sensitive populations including women of childbearing age and children under 15. DEQ is seeking funding to collect more data, which will enable more specific and targeted recommendations to be made in the future.

Predator species of fish in Oklahoma include all species of black bass (largemouth, smallmouth and spotted), striped bass, white bass, hybrid striped bass, walleye, saugeye, and flathead catfish. Fish commonly caught in Oklahoma that are likely to have lower levels of mercury are channel catfish and all species of sunfish.

Mercury is found in the environment because of natural conditions and human activities. When moving through the environment, mercury goes through a series of complex changes. When these changes occur in lake and river sediments, some of the mercury can be converted to an organic form – methyl mercury. Methyl mercury enters the food chain and accumulates most readily in predator species of fish. It can then be passed to people who eat these fish. This is a concern because mercury can harm the developing nervous system of an unborn baby or young child.

DEQ reminds citizens that fish are an important part of a healthy diet. They provide high quality protein and many essential nutrients. Many people enjoy eating fish that are caught in Oklahoma lakes and streams. However, not all fish should be consumed in unlimited amounts by everyone.

For more information contact the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality at 405-702-1000.

