

PCBs in Fish and Shellfish

What and where are PCBs?

- PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are a group of industrial chemicals.
- PCBs were once used in consumer and industrial products, but were banned in the US in the 1970s.
- PCBs persist in the environment from spills, leaks, and improper disposal. They can remain for many years in soil and the sediment under rivers, lakes and other water bodies.
- PCBs may also be found in fish and shellfish. These foods can contain high levels of PCBs in some areas.

What is the health concern for humans?

- High levels of PCBs can cause health problems, including cancer.
- High levels of PCBs may harm the brains of babies and children, even before they are born.
- Women can pass PCBs on to their babies during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Should I still eat fish?

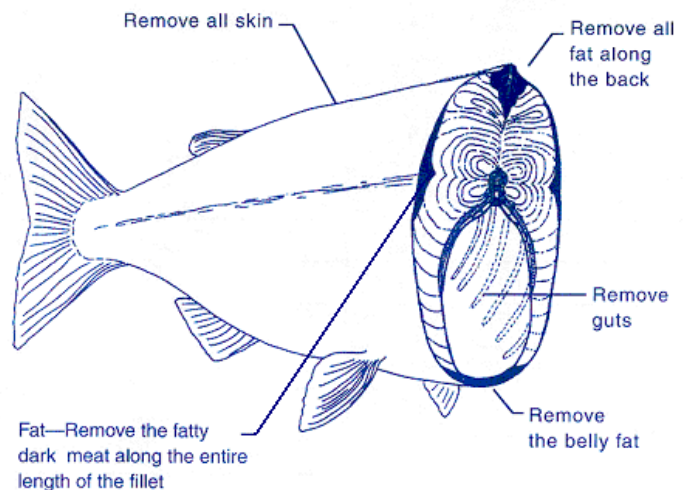
- Yes! Low-contaminant fish are an important part of a healthy, well-balanced diet. The American Heart Association recommends eating at least two servings of fish each week.
- Fish are a good source of protein, vitamins, and are a primary source of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Eating low-contaminant fish while pregnant may help the baby's brain develop. Follow the advice in this fact sheet for choosing and preparing fish.

Which fish have the most PCBs?

- Fatty fish, bottom feeders, and fish that eat other fish often have the highest PCB levels.
- Fish caught near industrial areas contaminated by PCBs tend to have the highest levels of PCBs.
- Larger, older fish tend to have more PCBs than younger fish.

How can I reduce my risk?

- If you catch your own fish, follow the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment's (OEHHA) [fish advisories](#) for California water bodies.
- Keep in mind that PCBs accumulate in the skin, fat, and some internal organs of fish or shellfish.
- Trim the fat, remove the skin, and fillet the fish before cooking. Eat only the skinless fillet (meat).
- For crab and lobster, remove the internal organs ("guts," "butter," or "tomalley") and rinse out the body cavity before cooking.
- Bake or grill fish in a way that lets the juices drain away. Throw away the cooking juices.
- Boil or steam crab and lobster, and discard the cooking liquid.
- Do not use the fat, skin, organs, juices, or the whole fish or shellfish, in soups and stews.



Where can I learn more?

- [OEHHA Fish Advisory Program in California](#)
- [Learn about Polychlorinated Biphenyls \(US EPA\)](#)
- [Tox Town PCBs \(NIH\)](#)

