

Oil Spills and Seafood Safety

What are the potential health risks in eating fish after an oil spill?

- Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are the chemicals in oil most likely to accumulate in seafood.
- PAHs also pose the greatest potential health risk to people who eat oiled seafood.
- Some PAHs may cause cancer.
 - See [PAHs in Fish and Shellfish](#) for more details.

What is OEHHA's role after an oil spill into California waters (freshwater or marine)?

- To evaluate the potential public health risks associated with seafood consumption following oil spills.
- To make recommendations on fisheries closure and re-opening to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's [Office of Spill Prevention and Response](#) (CDFW-OSPR).

What factors does OEHHA consider in evaluating seafood safety?

- Oil type and amount spilled
- Location of the spill
- Spill response (level of oil containment)
- Weather and water temperature
- Fishing activity in the area
- Seafood species
 - Likelihood of oil exposure
 - Potential to bioaccumulate PAHs
 - Commercial, recreational, or subsistence importance
 - Location (in the water, on the shoreline, or buried in sediments)

When is a fisheries closure required by law?

- CDFW must close fisheries in 24 hours unless OEHHA determines fishing or consuming fish is unlikely to be a public health threat ([Fish and Game Code 5654](#))

When will the area be open for fishing?

- *Within 48 hours after spill notification*
 - Public access may be restricted for spill response and worker safety.
 - In some cases, the oil will break down quickly and no closure is needed.
 - An initial closure can be lifted without testing if a public health threat is unlikely as determined by OEHHA.
- *More than 48 hours after spill notification*
 - If fisheries closure continues for more than 48 hours after spill notification, then rapid testing of seafood is required before fisheries can be re-opened.
 - See our [Oil Spills and Seafood Fact Sheet](#) for details on seafood testing, laboratory analyses, and OEHHA's risk evaluation.
 - See our [flow chart](#) for the process and approximate timeline to re-opening.

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment

California Environmental Protection Agency

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