Information About Eating Fish from Humboldt Bay (Humboldt County)

Why did OEHHA update the advisory for eating fish from Humboldt Bay?

OEHHA updated the advisory for Humboldt Bay because additional data became available, and to offer shellfish advice based on new consumption guidelines for cadmium. This advisory supersedes the previous advisory released in 2018 and is based on levels of cadmium, mercury, and polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) levels found in the fish and shellfish caught from this water body. This advisory is part of an ongoing effort by OEHHA to provide safe-eating advice for fish from different California water bodies. Humboldt Bay is located adjacent to the city of Eureka in Humboldt County along California's northern coast.

Why should I eat fish?

- The American Heart Association recommends eating at least two servings of fish each week. Low-contaminant fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy, well-balanced diet.
- Fish and shellfish are a good source of protein and vitamins, and are a primary dietary source of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Eating low-contaminant fish while pregnant may be beneficial to the baby's brain development.

Which contaminants are of concern for people eating fish and shellfish from Humboldt Bay?

- Cadmium
  - Cadmium is a metal found naturally in soil and water (including oceans and freshwater sources). Cadmium builds up in the internal organs of fish and shellfish. Bivalve shellfish often have higher levels than those in fish.
  - Too much cadmium can harm the fetus because it can interfere with the development and function of the placenta. Women can pass cadmium on to their babies during breastfeeding It can also damage the kidneys of children and adults..
  - OEHHA has advice specifically for pregnant women, as well as advice for non-pregnant women, men 18 years and older, and children 1–17 years old.

- Mercury
  - Mercury is a metal that comes from mining, air fallout from burning coal and other fuels, and from natural sources. It is the most commonly found contaminant of concern in fish.
  - Too much methylmercury, the form of mercury found in fish, can harm the brain, especially in fetuses, babies, and children. Methylmercury can pass from mothers to their babies during pregnancy.
  - Because fetuses, babies, and children are especially sensitive to mercury, OEHHA has one set of advice for how much mercury-containing fish women ages 18–49 years and children should eat, and another set of advice for women 50 years and older and men 18 years and older.
- PCBs
  - PCBs are industrial chemicals. While banned in the 1970s, they persist for many years in the environment and are still found in fish, sediment, and water as a result of spills, leaks, and improper disposal.
  - PCBs can increase cancer risk. PCBs may also harm the developing fetus, which can include effects on growth and learning. Women can pass PCBs on to their babies during pregnancy and breastfeeding.
  - PCBs can build up to very high levels in the skin, fat, and some internal organs of fish. That is why OEHHA recommends eating only the skinless fillet (meat) of fish.

Are harmful algal blooms (HABs) a concern for people eating fish and shellfish from Humboldt Bay?

- Harmful algal blooms can occur in marine waters at any time of the year, and conditions may change rapidly during an active bloom event. Before visiting Humboldt Bay, OEHHA recommends checking with:
  - The California Department of Public Health for the annual mussel quarantine, shellfish and seafood biotoxin advisories, and other marine shellfish biotoxin-related closures available via the 24-hour Shellfish Biotoxin Information Line: 1-800-553-4133.
  - The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's list of biotoxin-related advisories and closures for marine waters.

How did OEHHA determine the consumption guidelines for eating fish and shellfish from Humboldt Bay?

- OEHHA compared contaminant levels in fish and shellfish caught from Humboldt Bay to levels that are not likely to cause harmful effects when consumed.
- OEHHA's consumption guidelines balance the health benefits of fish consumption and the risks from the contaminants.

What does OEHHA recommend for people who want to eat fish and shellfish from Humboldt Bay?

- OEHHA recommends the types and amounts of fish and shellfish that may be eaten each week as "servings." For finfish, a serving is 8 ounces, or about the size and thickness of your hand for fish fillets. Give children smaller servings. For smaller fish species, several individual fish may be required to yield a serving. The serving size for crustaceans (e.g., crabs) and bivalves (e.g., clams, mussels, and oysters) is 8 and 4 ounces, respectively.

Finfish Species

- Women 18–49 years and children 1–17 years
  - Should not eat Leopard Shark
  - May eat:
    - 7 total servings per week of Speckled Sanddab, or
    - 4 total servings per week of Threespine Stickleback, or
    - 1 total serving per week of California Halibut, Lingcod, Pile Perch, Shiner Perch, Walleye Surfperch, or White Surfperch.
- Women 50 years and older and men 18 years and older
  - May eat:
    - 7 total servings per week of Speckled Sanddab or Threespine Stickleback, or
    - 3 total servings per week of California Halibut, Pile Perch, or Walleye Surfperch, or
    - 2 total servings per week of Lingcod, Shiner Perch, White Surfperch, or
    - 1 total serving per week of Leopard Shark.

Shellfish Species

- Pregnant Women
  - Should not eat clam species, mussel species, Pacific Oyster, or Red Rock Crab
  - May eat:
    - 1 total serving per week of Striped Shore Crab.
- Non-Pregnant Women, Men 18 years and older, and Children 1–17 Years
  - May eat:
    - 2 total servings per week of Striped Shore Crab, or
    - 1 total serving per week of clam species, or
    - 2 total servings per month of mussel species, Pacific Oyster, or Red Rock Crab.
- For additional fish species found in Humboldt Bay and not included in this advisory, OEHHA recommends following the statewide advisory for eating fish from California's coastal locations without site-specific advice.

How long is the advisory in effect?

This advisory remains in effect until an update is issued. Because cadmium and mercury levels in fish and shellfish are typically stable over time, an update is only developed when new data become available that would change the current advice or add new species.

What else can I do to protect my health and the health of my family?

- Eat a variety of fish.
- Eat smaller (younger) fish of legal size.
- Eat only the skinless fillet or meat portion of fish.
- Thoroughly cook the fish and allow the juice to drain away.
- Learn about OEHHA's guidelines for eating sport fish in California:
  - Visit https://oehha.ca.gov/fish/advisories, or call OEHHA at (916) 324-7572 or (510) 622-3170
  - Check the Freshwater or Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations booklets from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, or visit https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Regulations.

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