

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment



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Fish Advisory for Monterey County's Elkhorn Slough Offers Safe Eating Advice for Asian Clam, Bat Ray, and Other Species

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SACRAMENTO – A new state fish advisory issued today offers safe eating advice for five species of fish from Elkhorn Slough in Monterey County.

Women younger than 46 and children younger than 18 should not eat any Leopard Shark or large Bat Ray from Elkhorn Slough, which have high levels of mercury. But people of all ages can safely eat as many as seven servings per week of Asian Clam or Speckled Sanddab, which have lower levels of the contaminant.

“Eating fish low in mercury can help reduce the risk of heart disease and is an excellent source of protein,” said Dr. Lauren Zeise, acting director of the California Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA). “These guidelines are designed to balance the health benefits of eating fish against the risks from exposure to mercury and PCBs.”

The recommendations developed by OEHHA for each fish species are based on the levels of mercury and PCBs measured in fish from Elkhorn Slough in Monterey County. Elkhorn Slough is at the center of the Monterey Bay coastline.

Mercury is a naturally occurring metal that is released into the environment from mining and burning coal and accumulates in fish in the form of methylmercury. Methylmercury can damage the brain and nervous system, especially in developing children and fetuses. PCBs can affect the nervous system, and can cause cancer and other health effects.

When consuming fish from Elkhorn Slough, women ages 18-45 and children ages 1-17 can safely eat seven servings per week of Asian Clam or Speckled Sanddab, or three servings per week of surfperch, or one serving per week of Bat Ray under 24 inches wide. Women (18-45 years) and children (1-17 years) should not eat any Leopard Shark or any Bat Ray measuring 24 inches or wider.

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Women age 46 and older and men age 18 and older can safely eat seven servings per week of Asian Clam or Speckled Sanddab, or four servings per week of Bat Ray under 24 inches wide or surfperch. Alternatively, they can eat one serving per week of either leopard shark or Bat Ray measuring 24 inches or wider.

One serving is eight ounces prior to cooking, which for fish fillets is roughly the size and thickness of your hand. Children should be given smaller servings.

Eating fish in amounts slightly greater than the advisory's recommendations is not likely to cause health problems if it is done occasionally, such as eating fish caught during an annual vacation.

The health advisory and eating advice for Elkhorn Slough – as well as eating guidelines for other fish species and California bodies of water – are available at <http://www.oehha.ca.gov/fish/advisories>. Pictorial fish consumption advice is also available on that page in both English and Spanish.

OEHHA is the primary state entity for the assessment of risks posed by chemical contaminants in the environment. Its mission is to protect and enhance public health and the environment by scientific evaluation of risks posed by hazardous substances.

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