

SAFE EATING GUIDELINES

and More Information

For Fish from Magic Johnson Lakes

What are “Safe Eating Guidelines?”

Safe Eating Guidelines help people make healthy choices when eating fish. Because chemicals in our environment can end up in the fish we eat, not all fish can be safely eaten. In California, “OEHHA” (the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment) gives advice for fish from water bodies in our state. OEHHA’s safe eating guidelines show which fish are safe to eat and which fish offer the most health benefits.

Why are there safe eating guidelines for fish from Magic Johnson Lakes?

Los Angeles County called for a study of chemical levels in fish from Magic Johnson Lakes in the Willowbrook area of Los Angeles. The results from tests on 83 fish including bass, bluegill, carp, catfish, and trout showed that:

- Bass had high mercury levels.
- Carp had high levels of PCBs.
- Bluegill, catfish, and trout had lower chemical levels.

OEHHA used the information from these studies to decide how much fish from these lakes is safe to eat.

How do chemicals like mercury and PCBs get in fish?

Mercury comes from volcanoes and other natural sources, but it also comes from human sources such as coal-burning power plants and mining waste. Mercury in air and on the land eventually ends up in water bodies and the living things in the water.

PCBs are a large group of man-made industrial chemicals that were banned in 1977. They were used in electrical transformers, plastics, and lubricating oils. Spills, leaks, and improper disposal are the main ways that PCBs have entered the environment.

Fish take in mercury and PCBs in their diet. Fish that eat many other fish usually have the highest mercury levels. Fatty fish generally have higher levels of PCBs.

What are the health effects from eating fish with mercury and PCBs?

Mercury in fish is thought to be most risky for babies and children because too much mercury can cause changes in the brain while it is growing. Mothers can pass mercury to their babies during pregnancy. For these reasons, OEHHA gives guidelines that are more cautious for women ages 18–45 and children 1–17 years when fish have high mercury levels.

Studies with animals show that high levels of PCBs could harm the liver, digestive tract, and nerves; and could affect development, reproduction, and the immune system. PCBs have also been found to cause cancer in some animal studies. Some studies of people suggest that low levels of PCBs, like those found in some fish, might cause small decreases in children’s I.Q. or affect their memory, especially if exposures occur during pregnancy. The evidence for these effects is less clear.

Should I stop eating fish?

No! Fish are a nutritious source of protein and heart-healthy fats that benefit the heart, brain, and eyes. That is why the American Heart Association recommends healthy adults eat at least two servings of fish each week.

“Omega-3s” are beneficial nutrients found in fish. It is important for pregnant women to eat fish while they are pregnant because omega-3s help the baby’s brain develop.”

To get the most benefit from eating fish, it is important to eat fish low in chemicals and high in omega-3s.

What should I do to protect my health and my children’s?

Follow the guidelines in the “Guide to Eating Fish Caught in Magic Johnson Lakes.” Note there is separate advice for:

- Women ages 18–45 and children 1–17 years
- Women over 45 years and men

OEHHA gives safe eating guidelines for many water bodies in California. Check for these guidelines in one of these places:

- Fresh Water or Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations booklets from the California Department of Fish and Game, or www.dfg.ca.gov/regulations
- Call OEHHA at (916) 323-7319 or (510) 622-3170, or visit www.oehha.ca.gov (click on “FISH” then “Safe Eating Guidelines”)