

If I Catch It, Can I Eat It?

A Guide to Safe Eating of Fish Caught in Connecticut



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Pamphlet Based Upon 2002 Fish Advisory

Background:

Fish from Connecticut's waters are a healthy, low-cost source of protein. Unfortunately, some fish tend to take up chemicals such as mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) so that eating these fish may affect your family's health. The Connecticut Department of Public Health (CTDPH) issues advisories for decreasing fish consumption when chemical levels are unsafe.

Why Should I Follow This Advice?

This advice is meant to protect the health of families who eat fish caught in Connecticut.

Here are the dangers to health.

- **Mercury** is a toxic metal that can build up in your body and damage your nervous system and kidneys. Women who eat fish containing mercury before or during pregnancy may have children who are slow to develop and learn.
- **PCBs** are toxic chemicals which can build up in your body. They are most dangerous during pregnancy and to young children. PCBs also may cause cancer.
- **Chlordane** is a toxic pesticide that can cause cancer and harm during pregnancy.

What Does The Fish Consumption Advisory Say?

The advisory lets you know how often you can safely eat fish from Connecticut's waters. It provides two types of advice: 1) a general advisory that applies to most of the freshwater fish in the state; and 2) specific advice for those fish where special warnings are needed due to higher chemical levels. Refer to the chart and map in this brochure for details. Statewide advice and specific advisories also list separate advice for high risk and low risk groups. This brochure also points out which fish are low in contaminants and can be eaten more frequently (see sections for Long Island Sound, store-bought fish and trout).

Am I In The High Risk Group?

- You are in the **High Risk Group** if you are a *pregnant woman*, a *woman planning to become pregnant within 1 year*, or a *child under the age of 6*.
- If you are in the High Risk Group, you should limit eating most fish from Connecticut's fresh waters to *one meal per month*. As shown in the chart, you should not eat certain fish at all since they have especially high levels of mercury, PCBs or the pesticide chlordane.



A SPECIAL FACT SHEET FOR PREGNANT WOMEN CAN BE OBTAINED BY CALLING THE CT DPH (860-509-7742), OR BY GOING TO OUR WEB SITE :

<http://www.state.ct.us/dph/BCH/eeoh/webfish.htm>

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- If you do not fit into the High Risk Group, you are in the **Low Risk Group**. In general, people in this group should eat *no more than one fish meal per week* from Connecticut's freshwater bodies (see chart).

Are Trout Safe To Eat?

Most trout from Connecticut's waters are safe to eat because they usually have little contamination. However, there are limits on trout from the Housatonic River due to PCBs and on large trout from lakes due to mercury (see chart).

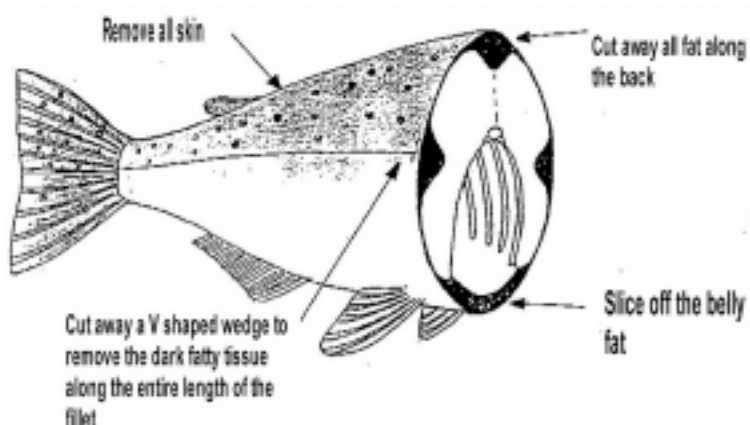
Who Should Follow This Advice?

This advice should be followed by all people who eat fish from Connecticut waters. Everyone fits into either the High Risk or Low Risk Group. Anglers and their families should be particularly aware of family members who are in the **High Risk Group** and make sure that they follow the advisory.

What Else Can I Do To Eat Fish Safely?

PCBs are mostly in the fatty portions of fish. It is very important to remove skin and other fatty parts. Cook fish on a rack (broil) so that fat can drip away from the flesh.

Fatty portions to remove before cooking



Remove and do not eat the organs, head, skin and the dark fatty tissue along the back bone, lateral lines and belly.

Mercury is in the edible (fillet) portion of fish. Therefore, you cannot lower your exposure to mercury by cooking or cleaning the fish. It is important to remember that large fish tend to have the highest levels of PCBs and mercury. Therefore, if you have a choice, eat smaller fish of any given species. In addition, certain smaller species generally have lower levels of contamination (perch, small trout, sunfish).

How Do These Contaminants Get Into Fish?

Mercury and PCBs can build up in fish to levels that are thousands of times higher than in the water. These contaminants enter the water from:

- Chemical spills that occurred in the past. Even though these spills have been stopped, it will take years for the mercury or PCB levels in the fish to drop to safe levels.
- Mercury in the air. Mercury travels long distances from where it is released. Much of it comes from air pollution outside of Connecticut.

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CTDEP) is working to improve water quality in Connecticut and is limiting the amount of mercury which can be released into the air.

If the Fish Have Mercury or PCBs, Do These Contaminants Also Make The Water Unsafe For Swimming?

The amount of mercury and PCBs in Connecticut waters does not cause a health hazard from wading or swimming in the water. However, do not assume that waters that are safe for fishing are also safe for swimming. Contact your town's Health Director to find out if the water is safe for swimming.

What About Fish from the Store?

Two types of fish, **shark and swordfish**, have higher levels of mercury and should not be eaten by pregnant women, women planning to become pregnant, or young children. For those not in the high risk group, shark and swordfish should be limited to 1 or 2 meals per month.

Most other fish from the store can be eaten during pregnancy but the total number of fish meals, including canned tuna, should be limited to **1 to 2 meals per week**. If you would like to eat fish more often, choose fish that are low in mercury such as haddock, pollack, cod, flounder, and salmon. When buying tuna, choose "light tuna" - it has lower mercury levels and can be eaten more frequently than "white" or "chunk white" tuna.



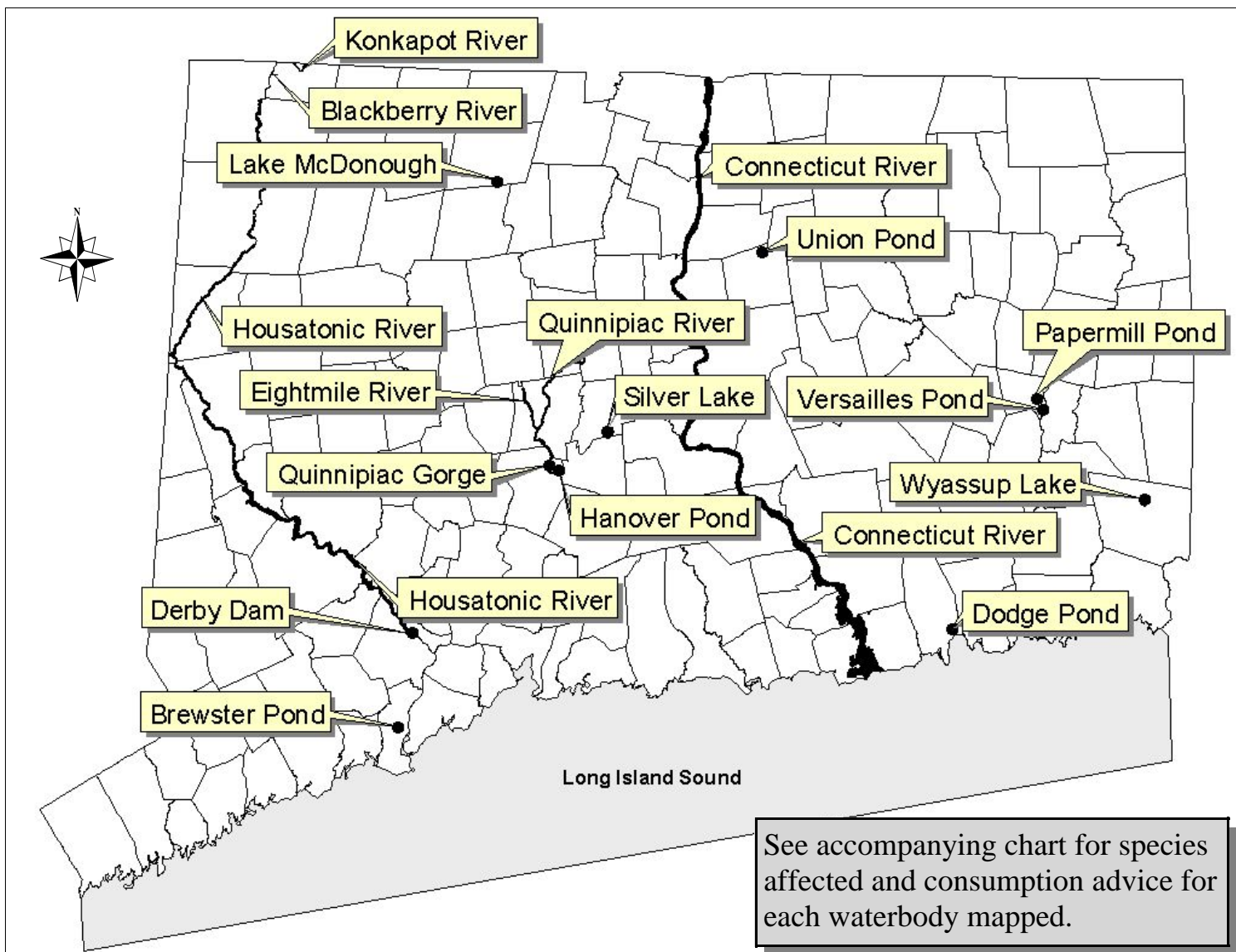
Please unfold for more information



(This fact sheet is funded in part by funds from the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act trust fund through a cooperative agreement with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.)

Connecticut Safe Fish Consumption

Waterbodies of Specific Concern in Connecticut's 2002 Fish Consumption Advisory
(All other freshwater bodies fall under the general statewide advisory)



- REMEMBER**
- Follow this advisory to make sure the fish you eat are safe for your family.
 - While this advisory focuses on locally caught fish, you should also be selective about store bought fish. See advice on page 3.
 - Most trout are not part of the advisory and are safe to eat.
 - Long Island Sound:* Most fish are safe to eat except for listed restrictions on Striped Bass and Bluefish.
 - The *High Risk* group consists of pregnant women, women planning pregnancy within a year and children under age 6.
 - The *High Risk Group* should eat no more than one fish meal per month of most freshwater fish. More restrictions apply to fish from certain waterbodies.
 - The *Low Risk Group* should limit eating most freshwater fish to once a week.
 - Your exposure to PCBs in fish can be further reduced by trimming away fat and cooking fish on a rack so that fat drips away.

2002 Advisory for Eating Fish From Connecticut Waterbodies

Advisory Type	Waterbody	Fish Species	High Risk Group ^a Advice	Low Risk Group Advice	Contaminant
Statewide Freshwater Fish	All fresh waterbodies (See more restrictive advice for specific waterbodies listed below.)	-Trout	No Limits on Consumption ^c	No Limits on Consumption	--
		-All other fish	One meal per month	One meal per week	Mercury
More Restrictive Advice For Specific Freshwater Fish	Dodge Pond Lake McDonough Silver Lake Wyassup Lake	-Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Pickerel	Do not eat	One meal per month	Mercury
	Housatonic River above Derby Dam (Includes Lakes Zoar, Lillinonah, and Housatonic)	-Trout, Catfish, Eels, Carp	Do not eat	Do not eat	PCBs
		-Bass, White Perch, Bullheads	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
		-Other Species ^d	One meal per month	One meal per week	Mercury
	Quinnipiac River above Quinnipiac Gorge Q Gorge/Hanover Pond (Meriden)	-All Species	Do not eat	Do not eat	PCBs
		-All Species	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
	Eight Mile River (Southington)	-All Species	Do not eat	Do not eat	PCBs
	Connecticut River	-Carp	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
		-Catfish	Do not eat	One meal per month	PCBs
	Versailles, Papermill Ponds & connecting section of Little River (Sprague)	-All Species	Do not eat	One meal per month	Mercury, PCBs
	Blackberry River Downstream of "Blast Furnace" (North Canaan)	-Smallmouth Bass	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
Konkapot River (North Canaan)	-White Suckers	Do not eat	One meal per month	Mercury	
Brewster Pond (Stratford)	-Catfish & Bullheads	Do not eat	Do not eat	Chlordane	
Union Pond (Manchester)	-Carp, Catfish, Bass	Do not eat	Do not eat	Chlordane	
Specific Salt-water Fish	Long Island Sound and connected rivers	-Striped Bass	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
		-Bluefish over 25"	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
		-Bluefish 13- 25" ^b	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
		-Lobster tomalley ^c	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Health Questions?
Call CTDPH at 860-509-7742.

Questions about fishing in Connecticut?
Call CTDEP at 860-424-3474.

^a **High Risk Group** includes pregnant women, women planning to become pregnant within one year, and children under 6. Low risk group includes everyone not in the High Risk Group.

^b Snappers, which are bluefish under 13", are not on the advisory because they are not contaminated.

^c Refers to the hepatopancreas or tomalley of lobsters; lobster meat is not contaminated.

^d For panfish (yellow perch, sunfish, Pumpkinseed, etc) refer to Statewide Freshwater Fish section above regarding mercury.

^e It is prudent for the High Risk Group to eat no more than one large trout (over 15") from lakes and ponds per month. See more restrictive trout advice above for sections of the Housatonic and Quinnipiac Rivers.