



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Connecticut FISH ADVISORY – SIGNS and CARDS

Questions and Answers for Supermarket Fish Department Staff

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (CT DPH) thanks you for your assistance in making sure Connecticut residents make healthy choices when buying fish. Fish are an excellent source of protein and fish oils. However some species have a high level of mercury that could be harmful for pregnant women and small children. Your help in getting this message out is very important and appreciated! The Q & A below should help you better understand our sign and card in case customers ask you about them.

Question: *What advice does the sign/card give about fish consumption?*

Answer: The sign lists fish species that should and should not be eaten by women and children. It highlights healthy species with little contamination and higher levels of fish oils that can be eaten frequently. It identifies a small number of highly contaminated species that should not be eaten at all by women who are pregnant, nursing, or might become pregnant and young children (i.e. swordfish, shark). The sign and card give a balanced message, emphasizing the positive health impacts of eating the proper fish species, while warning against the more contaminated species.

Question: *Who is the advice for?*

Answer: The advice is primarily for women who are pregnant or might become pregnant, nursing mothers and children under the age of 6. These people are considered the high risk group.

Question: *What about other adults and older children?*

Answer: Other people not in the high-risk group are not specifically covered by this advice. However, even these people should reduce their consumption of fish in the “red” category. If you get asked about advice for such people, suggest they call the State Department of Public Health (DPH) at the toll free telephone number on the sign (1-877-458-FISH).

Question: *How much fish can safely be eaten?*

Answer: The sign has 3 categories for consumption. The “red” category has the highest contamination and should not be eaten at all by people in the high risk group. Species in the “yellow” category have moderate contamination and can be eaten once a week. Species in the “green” category have low contamination levels and can be eaten 2 times a week. Species with hearts next to them are high in healthy fish oils (Omega – 3s) or very low in contamination and can be eaten more than twice a week.

Question: *What about fish species not on the sign?*

Answer: We tried to include the most commonly sold fish in CT stores on the sign. However, we realize that other species may be available. If a customer asks about another species, or if you as a store employee are interested, call DPH at the toll free number and we will research its level of contamination and Omega – 3s. The federal government recommends that people eat 2 meals a week of a variety of fish species. This is good general advice to give out if someone is interested in a species not covered by our sign.

Phone:



Telephone Device for the Deaf: (860) 509-7191

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- Question:** *What about canned tuna fish and tuna steaks?*
Answer: Canned tuna is covered in the advice. Light canned tuna has lower levels of contamination and is in the “green” category recommending up to 2 meals a week. White canned tuna has moderate levels of contamination and is therefore in the yellow category of 1 meal a week. Tuna steaks are also in the yellow category of one meal a week. In general, tuna steaks and white canned tuna come from larger fish and therefore have higher levels of mercury.
- Question:** *What about farm raised and wild salmon?*
Answer: Salmon has the highest levels of healthy Omega – 3 fish oils. Wild salmon also has very low levels of contamination making wild salmon one of the healthiest fish choices. Farm raised salmon is also very high in Omega – 3 levels. However, they have moderate levels of contamination so they are in the “yellow” one meal a week category.
- Question:** *What about shellfish and lobsters?*
Answer: Shellfish, shrimp, and lobsters are in the green category so can be eaten twice a week. The meat of lobsters has low levels of chemical contaminants. However, the tomalley (green gland) of the lobster has high levels of contamination and should not be eaten by anyone. This tomalley advice is not included because it is too complex a message to deliver in a sign and because it is likely that most people do not regularly eat the tomalley. --- Remember that shellfish such as clams and mussels are susceptible to bacterial contamination and must come from an approved source.
- Question:** *What chemical contaminants in the fish are causing this advice?*
Answer: Mercury is by far the most common contaminant resulting in advice for store-bought fish. Almost all of the species in the “Yellow” and “Red” categories are there due to their mercury levels. The one exception is farm-raised salmon which is in the “yellow” category due to moderate levels of PCBs and other persistent pollutants. PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are a group of banned chemicals once used as coolants and lubricants.
- Question:** *What are the health impacts of mercury and PCBs?*
Answer: Both chemicals have their greatest impact on the fetus. Mercury and PCBs can impact the developing central nervous system resulting in delayed neurologic development after birth. Mercury can also affect heart health in adults and can even increase the risk of heart attacks. At very high exposure levels, even adults can have neurologic effects from mercury. Such toxicity has actually been seen in avid sushi eaters.
- Question:** *What are the benefits of eating fish high in Omega – 3 fatty acids?*
Answer: Omega – 3s, enhance brain development during the fetal stage and also after birth. Adults who eat fish high in Omega – 3s likely have decreased risk of heart disease including a reduced risk of heart attacks.

For More Information:

Call CTDPH toll-free at:
1-877-458-FISH (3474)

Web Site: www.ct.gov/dph/fish