



If I Catch It, Can I Eat It?

A Guide to Eating Fish Safely 2021 Connecticut Fish Consumption Advisory



<https://portal.ct.gov/fish>
1-877-458-FISH (3474)

This pamphlet will give you information that will help your family avoid chemicals in fish and eat fish safely.

Fish from Connecticut’s waters are a healthy, low-cost source of protein. Unfortunately, some fish take up chemicals such as mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). These chemicals can build up in your body and increase health risks. The developing fetus and young children are most sensitive. Women who eat fish containing these chemicals before or during pregnancy or nursing may have children who are slow to develop and learn. Long term exposure to PCBs may increase cancer risk.

What Does The Fish Consumption Advisory Say?

The advisory tells you how often you can safely eat fish from Connecticut’s waters and from a store or restaurant. In many cases, separate advice is given for the **High Risk** and **Low Risk** Groups.

- You are in the **High Risk Group** if you are a *pregnant woman*, a *woman who could become pregnant*, a *nursing mother*, or a *child under six*.
- If you do not fit into the High Risk Group, you are in the **Low Risk Group**.

Advice is given for three different types of fish consumption:

1. Statewide **FRESHWATER** Fish Advisory: Most freshwater fish in Connecticut contain enough mercury to cause some limit to consumption. The statewide freshwater advice is that:

- High Risk Group: eat no more than 1 meal per month
- Low Risk Group: eat no more than 1 meal per week

2. Advisories for **SPECIFIC WATERBODIES**: Certain waterbodies contain fish with higher levels of contaminants. These waterbodies include the Housatonic River, part of the Quinnipiac River, certain lakes, and certain species from Long Island Sound. The large chart in the center of this pamphlet provides details on eating fish safely from these waterbodies.

3. Advice for Fish Purchased from the **MARKET**: Most fish from the market are healthy to eat and contain important nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids. However, there are some fish that contain high levels of mercury or PCBs and so should be eaten less or not at all. This pamphlet points out which fish are healthy to eat and which ones are not safe to eat (small chart on page 3).

Are Trout Safe To Eat?

Most trout from Connecticut's rivers are safe to eat because they usually have little contamination and are routinely re-stocked. However, there are limits on trout from certain waterbodies due to PCBs and on large trout from lakes due to mercury (see large chart in center).

How Do These Contaminants Get Into Fish?

Mercury, PCBs and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) can build up in fish to levels that are thousands of times higher than in the water. These contaminants enter the water from:

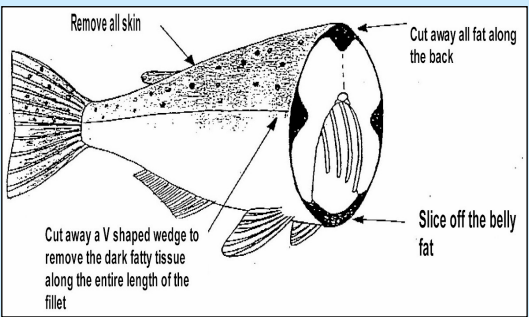
- Chemical spills that happened in the past. Even though these spills have been stopped, it will take years for the mercury or PCB levels in the fish to drop to safe levels.
- Mercury in the air. Mercury travels long distances from where it is released. Much of it comes from air pollution outside of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

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

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.

Remove fatty portions 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. Large fish usually have the highest levels of PCBs and mercury. If you have a choice, eat smaller fish of any species. In addition, certain smaller species generally have lower levels of contamination (perch, small trout, sunfish).

What About Fish from Markets and Restaurants?

Many fish from the market or restaurant are low in contaminants. Some of these fish are also high in omega-3 fatty acids, a nutrient oil from fish that improves brain development and helps prevent heart disease. However, some fish from the market can contain high levels of certain contaminants, especially mercury.

In general, people in the **High Risk Group** can eat up to 2 fish meals a week from the market or at restaurants. Certain fish are especially low in contaminants and can be eaten more often. The following are specific tips for those in the **High Risk** Group to choose healthy fish from the store:

- Swordfish and Shark: these contain high levels of mercury and **should not be eaten**.
- Canned tuna: Choose "light" tuna because it has less mercury than "white" tuna.
- Lobster and other shellfish are generally low in chemical contaminants. The tomalley portion of lobster (the green gland) can be high in contaminants and should not be eaten. This applies to lobster from Long Island Sound and elsewhere.

Fish from the Market and Restaurant

The chart below provides general guidance for Women & Children on which fish to choose. Fish with hearts are ♥ either especially high in omega-3 fatty acids and/or very low in contaminants and can be eaten more than twice a week.

Eat 2 Meals a Week		Eat 1 Meal a Week		Avoid
Herring ♥	Trout ♥	Tuna Steak		Swordfish
Pollock ♥	Haddock	Halibut		Shark
Salmon (wild) ♥	Perch	Red Snapper		King Mackerel
Atlantic Mackerel ♥	Tilapia	White Tuna (canned)		Striped Bass
Flounder & Fluke ♥	Light tuna (canned)	Catfish (farm-raised)		Tilefish (Gulf of Mexico)
Sole ♥	Cod	Tilefish (Atlantic)		Bluefish
Sardines & Smelt ♥	Salmon (farm-raised)			Tuna Sushi
Shellfish: oysters, shrimp, clams, scallops, lobster *		* see warning above about lobster tomalley		

People in the **Low Risk** Group can safely eat higher amounts of market seafood. For example, swordfish or shark - once per month; tuna steak or halibut - twice per week.





2021 Connecticut Safe Fish Consumption

Footnotes from Table:

- a. The **High Risk Group** includes pregnant women, women who could become pregnant, nursing women, and children under age 6.
- The **High Risk Group** should eat no more than one fish meal per month of most freshwater fish from local waters
- b. The **Low Risk Group** should limit eating most freshwater fish to once a week.
- c. Most trout are not part of the advisory and are safe to eat. However, the high risk group should eat no more than one meal of large trout (over 15”) per month and should not eat trout from the Housatonic River.
- d. The Natchaug River from the dam at the Willimantic Reservoir (northern boundary) downstream to where it forms the Shetucket River. The advisory extends a 1/2 mile down the Shetucket River to Plains Road. Willimantic River from where it meets the Shetucket and Natchaug Rivers upstream to the dam at Pine Street.
- e. Snappers (bluefish under 13”) are not on the advisory because they have very low contamination.

REMEMBER

Follow this advisory to make sure the fish you choose to eat are safe for your family.

- Every fresh waterbody has some consumption limits as indicated at the top of the chart.
- *Long Island Sound*: Most fish are safe to eat except for listed restrictions on striped bass, bluefish, and weakfish.
- Be aware of advice for fish from the market or restaurant. See market advice on page 3.
- Your exposure to PCBs in fish can be reduced by trimming away fat and cooking fish on a rack so that fat drips away.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

More specific fact sheets can be obtained by calling 1-877-458-FISH (3474), or by going to the DPH WEB SITE: <https://portal.ct.gov/fish>

Health Questions?
Call CT DPH toll-free at:
1-877-458-FISH (3474)

Questions about fishing in Connecticut?
Call CT DEEP at 860-424-3474.
www.ct.gov/deep/fishing

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

STATEWIDE FRESHWATER FISH ADVICE

Waterbody	Fish Species	High Risk Group ^a	Low Risk Group ^b	Contaminant
All fresh lakes, ponds, rivers & streams	Trout ^c Sunfish	No Limits on Consumption	No Limits on Consumption	- -
	All other freshwater fish	One meal per month	One meal per week	Mercury

SPECIAL ADVICE FOR THE HOUSATONIC RIVER AREA

Waterbody	Fish Species	High Risk Group ^a	Low Risk Group ^b	Contaminant
Housatonic River above Lake Lillinonah	Trout, Catfish, Eels, Carp, Northern Pike	Do not eat	Do not eat	PCBs
	Bass, White Perch	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
	Bluegill, Bullheads, Fallfish	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
	Yellow Perch, Calico Bass (Crappie), Rock Bass & Sunfish	One meal per month	One meal per week	PCBs
Lakes on Housatonic River: (Lillinonah, Zoar, Housatonic)	Catfish, Eels, Carp, Northern Pike, Trout	Do not eat	Do not eat	PCBs
	White Perch, Fallfish, Bullheads	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
	Bass	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
	Yellow Perch, Calico Bass (Crappie), Rock Bass, Bluegill & Sunfish	One meal per month	One meal per week	PCBs
Furnace Brook (Cornwall)	Trout	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
Blackberry River below "Blast Furnace" (North Canaan)	Smallmouth Bass	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs

SPECIAL ADVICE FOR OTHER CT FRESH WATERBODIES

Waterbody	Fish Species	High Risk Group ^a	Low Risk Group ^b	Contaminant
Dodge Pond Lake McDonough Silver Lake Wyassup Lake	Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Pickerel	Do not eat	One meal per month	Mercury
Quinnipiac River (Gorge south to Hanover Pond) Meriden	All Species	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
Connecticut River	Catfish	One meal per month	One meal per week	PCBs
Versailles, Papermill Ponds & attached Little River (Sprague)	All Species	Do not eat	Do not eat	Mercury 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
Natchaug, Willimantic and Shetucket Rivers ^d (Willimantic & Mansfield)	Bass	One meal per month	One meal per month	PFAS

SPECIAL ADVICE FOR LONG ISLAND SOUND

Waterbody	Fish Species	High Risk Group ^a	Low Risk Group ^b	Contaminant
Long Island Sound and connected rivers	Striped Bass Bluefish over 25"	Do not eat Do not eat	One meal per month One meal per month	PCBs PCBs
	Bluefish 13- 25 " ^e Weakfish	One meal per month One meal per month	One meal per month One meal per month	PCBs PCBs
Mill River, Fairfield [excluding Southport Harbor]	Blue Crab	Do not eat	Do not eat	Lead