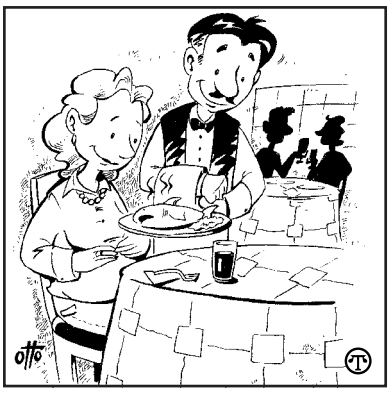
FDA NEWS OF SAFETY
Facts from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Mercury In Fish: What You Should Know
If You're Pregnant Or May Become Pregnant

(NAPSA)—Seafood, a low-fat source of high-quality protein and other nutrients, can be an important part of a balanced diet for pregnant women or women who may become pregnant.

However, some fish contain high levels of methylmercury, a form of mercury that can harm an unborn child's developing nervous system. Here, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) answers some common questions about fish so that expectant mothers can prevent harm to their unborn children and still enjoy the health benefits of eating seafood.



Fish, a beneficial food source, may contain mercury, which can be dangerous to unborn children.

How does mercury get into fish?

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and it can also be released into the air through industrial pollution. It falls from the air and can get into surface water, accumulating in streams and oceans. Bacteria in the water cause chemical changes that transform mercury into methylmercury, which can be toxic. Fish absorb methylmercury from water as they feed on aquatic organisms.

How can I avoid levels of mercury that could harm my unborn child?

Nearly all fish contain trace amounts of methylmercury, which is not harmful to humans. However, long-lived, larger fish that feed on other fish accumulate the highest levels of methylmercury and pose the greatest risk to people who eat them regularly. These include shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish. Although the primary danger is to unborn children, it is prudent for nursing mothers and young children not to eat these fish as well.

Is it all right to eat other fish?

Yes. As long as you select a variety of other kinds of fish while you are pregnant or may become pregnant, you can safely enjoy eating them—up to 12 oz. per week—as part of a healthful diet. You can choose shellfish, canned fish, smaller ocean fish or farm-raised fish—just pick a variety of different species. If you eat more than 12 oz. of fish in a given week, it's a good idea to balance it out by eating less the following week.

What about the fish caught by my family or friends in fresh water lakes and streams?

There can be a risk of contamination from mercury in fresh waters from either natural or industrial causes that would make the fish unsafe for you or your family to eat. The Environmental Protection Agency provides current advice on fish consumption from fresh water lakes and streams.

For more information about the risks of mercury in seafood, call toll-free 1-888-SAFEFOOD or visit the FDA's Food Safety Web site at www.cfsan.fda.gov. Additional information is also available at www.epa.gov/ost/fish.