

A Guide to Eating Fish Safely in Massachusetts



Eating fish is good for you, but fish caught in polluted waters can harm your health. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) issues fish consumption advisories (FCAs) based on available data. DPH has also issued a statewide FCA for sensitive people at waterbodies not tested for mercury.

Introduction

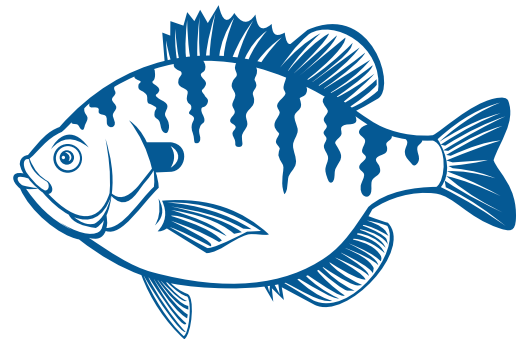
A varied diet, including fish, supports good nutrition and better health. Fish is mostly low in fat and high in protein and other nutrients. Eating fish may improve heart health and lower the risk of dementia. Eating fish may also reduce the risk of pre-term birth and low birth weight.

Fish may also contain harmful chemicals such as mercury, PCBs, PFAS, and pesticides. Most chemicals enter waterbodies from industrial sources. Chemicals then get into fish from the water, mud, and food that fish eat. These chemicals may cause health effects, such as developmental delays in children, damage to the nervous system, and increased cancer risk.

Staying healthy by reducing exposure

People should eat fewer large, predatory fish and fish that feed on the bottoms of waterbodies. Examples include largemouth bass and carp. Those fish are more likely to have high levels of chemicals. Instead, people should eat more panfish, such as pumpkinseed. Panfish are less likely to have high levels of chemicals.

If a fish has harmful chemicals, there is no way to completely remove the chemicals. Chemicals cannot be removed by cleaning or cooking the fish. People can reduce their exposure to chemicals in fish by not eating fat and fatty tissues. This is because chemical concentrations may be higher in the fat and fatty tissues. For example, people can remove the head, guts, kidneys, and liver, and eat the fillet only. People also can allow as much fat as possible to be drained away while cooking. To see the fish parts that should not be eaten, visit [Eating Fish is Healthy When You Eat the Right Parts! \(Fish health advisory infographic\)](#)



Bureau of Climate and Environmental Health
Division of Toxicology, Hazard Assessment and Prevention
Massachusetts Department of Public Health

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DPH issues FCAs for waterbodies when chemicals in fish are a health concern. Fetuses, infants, and young children are more sensitive to the effects of chemicals in fish. Therefore, DPH has different advisories for people who are sensitive and for the general population. Sensitive people include children younger than 12 and people who are nursing, pregnant, or may become pregnant. The general population includes adults and children aged 12 and older.

DPH primarily issues advisories for fresh waterbodies. DPH also has a statewide advisory for mercury in fresh waterbodies. In addition, DPH has advisories at several marine waterbodies.

Freshwater fish consumption advice

Fish advisories are available online here: [Freshwater Fish Consumption Advisory Lookup Table](#). Advisories may be posted at fishing access points. Advisories may also be posted online and in government offices.

Trout are not included in fish advisories, except for PFAS fish advisories. Stocked trout are raised in fish hatcheries and then released to waterbodies. Therefore, trout have less exposure to chemicals than other fish. To learn more about stocked trout, visit the [Trout Stocking Report](#).

Fish consumption advisories are based on available data for certain fish and chemicals. Eating fish not listed on a fish consumption advisory is safe, if the fish have been tested. If the fish have not been tested, the safety of eating those fish is not known. Fish consumption advisories are recommendations based on chemicals in the fillet, which is the main edible portion of the fish.

Please call 617-624-5757 to see if a water body has been tested. If you would like to request fish testing by the Massachusetts Department of Environment Protection, fill out the [Form For Requesting Fish Testing](#).



[Freshwater Fish
Consumption
Advisory Lookup
Table](#)

Statewide fish consumption advice

Do not eat:

Sensitive people should not eat fish caught from streams, rivers, lakes, and ponds that have not been tested for mercury.

A diet that includes **safe fish supports good nutrition and better health**. Eating a variety of safe fish and shellfish that are recreationally caught and store-bought will help reduce your chemical exposures.



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Marine fish consumption advice

New Bedford Harbor - Do not eat:

Nobody should eat fish, shellfish, lobsters, lobster tomalley (the soft green substance found in the tail and body), or bottom feeding fish from New Bedford Harbor. To learn more visit [Health Officials Remind Consumers Not to Eat Fish, Lobster and Shellfish from Area 1/Inside the Hurricane Barrier of New Bedford Harbor](#)

Boston Harbor - Do not eat:

Sensitive people should not eat lobsters, flounder, soft-shell clams, or bivalves.

All Other Coastal Massachusetts - Do not eat:

Sensitive people should not eat bluefish.

The federal government has additional advice about fish consumption. Please visit [FDA Fish Advice](#), [EPA Fish Advice](#), and [Eating Fish is Healthy When You Eat the Right Parts!](#)

