

MERCURY IN FISH - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. What is mercury?

Mercury is a naturally occurring metal that can be found in New Brunswick's soil and bedrock. It can be introduced into the environment by the break down of rocks and soils and by volcanic activity. Mercury can also enter streams, rivers, and oceans by rainwater or snow melt carrying soil and rocks from land surfaces into bodies of water.

2. What human activities can introduce mercury into the environment?

Human activities such as burning coal and other fossil fuels, certain industrial processes, mining activities, and miscellaneous waste management activities can introduce mercury into the environment.

3. How do some fish develop high levels of mercury?

Mercury is a metal which is known to slowly build-up in fish over time. Fish take in mercury when they absorb it from the surrounding water and when they eat other fish. Larger fish are more likely to take in more mercury because they eat smaller fish.

4. How do we get exposed to mercury from fish?

Everyone is exposed to some level of mercury in air, water, and food. When we eat fish that have mercury, our body takes in the mercury. Taking in high levels of mercury can be harmful. How much mercury you take in, and how long a period you take in mercury, impacts the effects it can have on your health.

5. Are some people more at risk from exposure to mercury?

Yes, women who are or may become pregnant, women who are breastfeeding, infants, and children are most at risk from mercury exposure. Specific consumption limit recommendations for these people can be found under "sensitive population" in the guideline.

6. Should I stop eating fish?

No. By making informed choices about what types of fish we eat and how often we eat them, you can limit your mercury exposure from fish and still have all the health benefits from eating fish.

7. What is considered a serving size of fish under the guideline?

A serving of fish is defined as:

- 75g or 2 ½ oz of cooked fish; OR
- 125 mL or ½ cup of cooked fish; OR
- a portion of cooked fish that fits in the palm of the consumer's hand

8. What are the consumption limits for the general population?

- Fish with mercury levels less than 0.5 mg/kg (ppm) mercury: 8 servings per month
- Fish with mercury levels between 0.5 and 1.0 mg/kg (ppm): 4 servings per month
- Fish with mercury levels between 1.0 and 1.5 mg/kg (ppm): 2 servings per month
- Fish with mercury levels over 1.5 mg/kg (ppm): Avoid

9. What are the consumption limits for the sensitive population?

- Fish with mercury levels less than 0.5 mg/kg (ppm) mercury: 1 serving per month
- Fish with mercury levels greater than 0.5 mg/kg (ppm): Avoid

10. Why are there consumption limits on some fish but not others?

Fish that eat smaller fish accumulate mercury over time and are more likely to retain mercury. Smaller fish who mostly eat insects and plants are less likely to have high concentrations of mercury.

If there is no consumption limit for a particular fish, either that type of fish has not been monitored for mercury, or levels for that type of fish were found to be below those that are a risk for human consumption.