

News from the Wyoming Department of Health and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Monday, December 17, 2012

Mercury-Related Guidelines Updated for Eating Fish

The Wyoming Department of Health and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department are advising residents to consider mercury levels in the fish they eat, including those caught in state waters, for health reasons.

“Fish is low in fat, high in protein and is good for your heart and brain,” said Dr. Wendy Braund, state health officer and Public Health Division senior administrator with the Wyoming Department of Health. “However, some fish contain high levels of mercury and that can pose a genuine health risk.”

A general mercury advisory was issued in Wyoming a few years ago. Mark Fowden, fisheries chief for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, said, “We are offering specific mercury-related advice and information for our state now because we have more data.”

Braund said, “We do not want folks to avoid fishing in Wyoming. This advisory can let people know about the potential health risks and allow them to make informed decisions for themselves about eating fish.”

The updated advisory is included in the newest fishing regulations booklet. More details, including information about fish from specific Wyoming bodies of water, is also available online.

“Women who are pregnant, who might become pregnant, nursing mothers and children under 15 should pay special attention to the guidelines and avoid eating fish found to be high in mercury,” Braund said. “At high levels, mercury can affect developing fetuses and the growing brains of children.”

The advisory notes women and young children should eat up to two meals per week (8 ounces per meal before cooking) of fish and shellfish low in mercury. The two meals per week include fish from all sources.

Fowden said mercury contamination increases as fish get larger and older. “As a general rule, it is better to keep smaller fish for eating,” he explained. “Rainbow trout, cutthroat trout and kokanee salmon contain less mercury than species that prey primarily on other fish, such as walleye, brown trout, lake trout, catfish and burbot.”

Fowden noted mercury advisories are nothing new. “Federal agencies have issued them for many years, as well as all other states.”

Mercury can be naturally occurring and some soil and geologic formations have higher levels of mercury. Other sources include atmospheric mercury from industrial processes and energy production.

Specific recommendations about Wyoming-caught fish and mercury can be found online at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/fishing-1001093.aspx>. As more data becomes available, including for bodies of water that have not yet been sampled, information will be added.

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