



## **INFORMATION ABOUT EATING FISH FROM CALIFORNIA RIVERS, STREAMS, AND CREEKS WITHOUT SITE-SPECIFIC ADVICE**

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA)  
California Environmental Protection Agency

September 2022

### **What is OEHHA's fish advisory program?**

OEHHA is responsible for evaluating potential public health risks from chemical contamination of sport fish. This includes issuing fish consumption advisories, when appropriate. Fish advisories are guidelines that recommend how often you can safely eat fish caught from water bodies in California. OEHHA has issued more than 100 site-specific advisories for lakes, reservoirs, rivers, bays, and the coast.

### **Why did OEHHA develop an advisory for eating fish from California rivers, streams, and creeks *without* Site-Specific Advice?**

OEHHA developed an advisory for California rivers, streams, and creeks because of mercury and PCBs found in the fish caught from these areas. This advisory is part of an ongoing effort by OEHHA to provide safe-eating advice for fish in different California water bodies.

### **Why should I eat fish?**

- Low-contaminant fish are an important part of a healthy, well-balanced diet. The American Heart Association recommends eating at least two servings of fish each week.
- Fish are a good source of protein and vitamins, and are a primary dietary source of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Eating low-contaminant fish while pregnant may be beneficial to the baby's brain development.

### **Which chemicals are of concern for people eating fish from California rivers, streams, and creeks?**

- Mercury
  - Mercury is a metal that comes from mining, air fallout from burning coal and other fuels, and from natural sources. It is the most commonly found contaminant of concern in fish.
  - Too much methylmercury, the form of mercury found in fish, can harm the brain, especially in fetuses, babies, and children. Mothers can pass methylmercury to their babies during pregnancy.
  - Because fetuses, babies, and children are especially sensitive to mercury, OEHHA has one set of advice for the amount of mercury-containing fish that women 18–49 years and children should eat, and another set of advice for women 50 years and older and men 18 years and older.

- Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)
  - PCBs are industrial chemicals. While banned in the 1970s, they persist for many years in the environment and are still found in the air, sediment, and water from spills, leaks, and improper disposal.
  - PCBs can increase cancer risk. PCBs may also harm the developing fetus, which can include effects on growth and learning. Women can pass PCBs on to their babies during pregnancy and breastfeeding.
  - PCBs can build up to very high levels in the skin, fat, and some internal organs of fish. That is why OEHHA recommends eating only the skinless fillet (meat) of fish.

### **How did OEHHA determine the consumption guidelines for this statewide advisory?**

- OEHHA compared chemical levels in fish caught from approximately 700 unique locations in rivers, streams, and creeks throughout California to levels that are considered safe for human consumption.
- OEHHA’s consumption guidelines balance the health benefits of fish consumption and the risks from the contaminants.

### **What does OEHHA recommend for people who want to eat fish from California rivers, streams, and creeks without Site-Specific Advice?**

- OEHHA recommends the amounts and types of fish that may be eaten each week as “servings.” A serving is about the size and thickness of your hand for fish fillets. Give children smaller servings. For smaller fish species, several individual fish may be required to yield a serving.
- Women 18–49 years and children 1–17 years
  - Should not eat black bass species, catfish species, Common Carp, Goldfish, Sacramento Pikeminnow, or Sacramento Sucker.
  - May eat:
    - 1 total serving per week of Brown Trout, bullhead species, Rainbow Trout, or sunfish species, or
    - 2 total servings per week of Red Shiner.
- Women 50 years and older and men age 18 years and older
  - May eat:
    - 1 total serving per week of black bass species, catfish species, Common Carp, Goldfish, Sacramento Pikeminnow, or Sacramento Sucker, or
    - 2 total servings per week of Brown Trout or sunfish species, or
    - 3 total servings per week of bullhead species or Rainbow Trout, or
    - 5 total servings per week of Red Shiner.

- For American Shad, Chinook Salmon, Steelhead Trout, Striped Bass, and White Sturgeon found in waters with access to the ocean, OEHHA recommends following the [Advisory for Fish that Migrate](#).

### Where does this advisory apply?

- Follow this advice for:
  - California rivers, streams, and creeks that do not have a site-specific fish advisory.
  - Fish species not included in an advisory for a specific California river, stream, or creek but are in the advisory for California Rivers, Streams, and Creeks without Site-Specific Advice.

### How long is the advisory in effect?

This advisory is effective starting September 2022 and does not expire. Chemical contaminant levels in fish do not change much over time; the advisory remains in effect until an update is issued.

### What else can I do to protect my health and the health of my family?

- Eat a variety of fish.
- Eat smaller (younger) fish of legal size.
- Eat only the skinless fillet or meat portion of fish.
- Thoroughly cook the fish and allow the juice to drain away.
- Learn about OEHHA's guidelines for eating sport fish in California:
  - Visit <https://oehha.ca.gov/fish/advisories>, or call OEHHA at (916) 324-7572 or (510) 622-3170
  - Check the Freshwater or Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations booklets from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, or visit <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Regulations>



**Women**  
(18 – 49 Years)

**Children**  
(1 – 17 Years)

**2** TOTAL SERVINGS A WEEK

OR

**1** TOTAL SERVING A WEEK

OR

**1** TOTAL SERVING A WEEK

**0** DO NOT EAT



**Women**  
(50+ Years)

**Men**  
(18+ Years)

**5** TOTAL SERVINGS A WEEK

OR

**3** TOTAL SERVINGS A WEEK

OR

**2** TOTAL SERVINGS A WEEK

OR

**1** TOTAL SERVING A WEEK

**Serving Size**

A serving of fish is about the size and thickness of your hand. Give children smaller servings.

For Adults



For Children



# A GUIDE TO EATING FISH

from CALIFORNIA RIVERS, STREAMS, AND CREEKS

WITHOUT SITE-SPECIFIC ADVICE\*

**Eat the Good Fish**

Eating fish that are low in chemicals may provide health benefits to children and adults.



**Avoid the Bad Fish**

Eating fish with higher levels of chemicals like mercury or PCBs may cause health problems in children and adults.



**Choose the Right Fish**

Chemicals may be more harmful to unborn babies and children.

  
Red Shiner

  
Bullhead Species

  
Rainbow Trout  
♥ high in omega-3s

  
Brown Trout  
♥ high in omega-3s

  
Sunfish Species

  
Black Bass Species

  
Common Carp

  
Sacramento Sucker

  
Catfish Species

  
Goldfish

  
Sacramento Pikeminnow

 California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment

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**Eat only the skinless fillet**



Some chemicals are higher in the skin, fat, and guts.

**Eat only the meat**



\*Please see the OEHA Advice for Fish that Migrate for American Shad, Chinook Salmon, Steelhead Trout, Striped Bass, and White Sturgeon.