



INFORMATION ABOUT EATING FISH FROM THE RUSSIAN RIVER (SONOMA AND MENDOCINO COUNTIES)

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA)
California Environmental Protection Agency
May 2019

Why did OEHHA develop an advisory for eating fish from the Russian River?

OEHHA developed an advisory for the Russian River because of mercury found in the fish caught from this water body. The Russian River originates near the town of Willits in northern California, and runs approximately 110 miles, flowing into the Pacific Ocean near the city of Jenner. This advisory only applies to the Russian River and does not include other flowing waters or reservoirs in the Russian River watershed. Site-specific advice has previously been developed for [Laguna de Santa Rosa](#), a major tributary of the Russian River, and two reservoirs in the Russian River watershed, [Lake Mendocino](#) and [Lake Sonoma](#). 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 help the baby's brain develop.

Which chemicals are of concern for people eating fish from the Russian River?

- Mercury
 - Mercury is a metal that comes from natural sources, mining, and air fallout from burning coal and other fuels. It is the most commonly found contaminant 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 age 18-49 years and children should eat, and another set of advice for women 50 years and older and men 18 years and older.

How did OEHHA determine the consumption guidelines for fish from the Russian River?

- OEHHA compared chemical levels in fish caught from the Russian River to levels that are considered safe for human consumption.
- OEHHA's consumption guidelines balance the risks and benefits of fish consumption.

What does OEHHA recommend for people who want to eat fish from the Russian River?

- 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, Sacramento Pikeminnow, or Sacramento Sucker
 - May eat:
 - 1 total serving per week of sculpin, sunfish species, or Tule Perch, or
 - 2 total servings per week of Threespine Stickleback
- Women 50 years and older and men age 18 years and older
 - Should not eat black bass species or Sacramento Pikeminnow
 - May eat:
 - 1 total serving per week of Sacramento Sucker, or
 - 2 total servings per week of sculpin, sunfish species, or Tule Perch, or
 - 5 total servings per week of Threespine Stickleback
- For additional fish species found in the Russian River and not included in this advisory, OEHHA recommends following the [statewide advisory for eating fish that migrate](#).

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, 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

0 DO NOT
EAT

0 DO NOT
EAT

Serving Size

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

For Adults



For Children



Women
(50+ Years)

Men
(18+ Years)

5 TOTAL
SERVINGS
A WEEK

OR

2 TOTAL
SERVINGS
A WEEK

OR

1 TOTAL
SERVING
A WEEK

0 DO NOT
EAT

A GUIDE TO EATING FISH *from the* RUSSIAN RIVER

(SONOMA AND MENDOCINO COUNTIES)

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.



Threespine Stickleback

photo credit: Ken-ichi Ueda, inaturalist.org



Sculpin



Sunfish Species



Tule Perch



Sacramento Sucker



Black Bass Species



Sacramento Pikeminnow



California Office of Environmental
Health Hazard Assessment

web www.oehha.ca.gov/fish

email fish@oehha.ca.gov

phone (916) 324-7572

Eat only the
skinless fillet



Eat only the meat



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