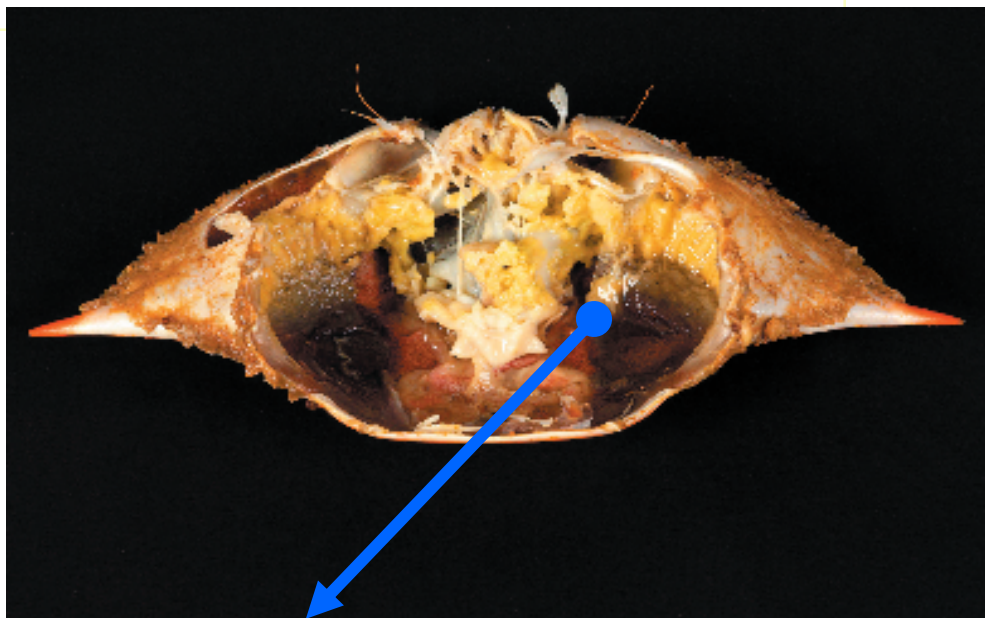


Health Information Alert for Blue Crabs from the Elizabeth River, Virginia

MACCHE: A Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit funded by the Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics through a cooperative agreement with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The Mid Atlantic Center for Children's Environmental Health (MACCHE) prepared this fact sheet to inform people who catch and eat crabs to limit or avoid eating the hepatopancreas or "yellow mustard" of blue crabs from the Elizabeth River.

Chemicals found in the mud of contaminated streams, rivers, and bays can get into the bodies of fish, crabs and other organisms. In crabs, some poisonous chemicals build up in the hepatopancreas or "yellow mustard". Examples of these chemicals are: polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and dioxins.



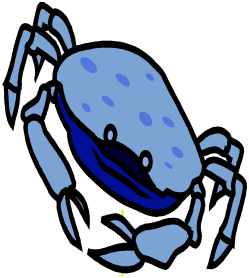
This yellow substance is the hepatopancreas or "mustard" of the crab

What is the hepatopancreas or "yellow mustard" of the blue crab?

The hepatopancreas is the yellowish substance found inside a cooked whole crab. Contrary to what most people believe, the mustard is not fat. The crab's hepatopancreas is the part of the crab that removes impurities from the crab's blood. The hepatopancreas is found under the top shell on both sides of the mid-gut in the main body cavity. The mustard has a strong smell and flavor, and some people enjoy eating it.

The Mid-Atlantic Center for Children's Health and the Environment

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Recommendation:

Public health officials and MACCHE discourage people, especially pregnant and nursing woman, women of child-bearing age and children, from eating the mustard of blue crabs from the Elizabeth River. In addition, individuals are encouraged to learn of fish consumption advisories in their area by contacting the health department.



What are the health effects associated with PCBs and dioxins?

Scientific studies have shown that exposures to high levels of PCBs can affect the functions of the reproductive organs. It can also affect the development of the brain and nervous system of fetuses and children. Women exposed to PCBs store these chemicals in their bodies which then get re-released during pregnancy, cross the placenta, and enter fetal tissues. PCBs can also accumulate in breast milk fat and be transferred to babies and your children when breastfeeding.

For more information

about fish consumption advisories for Virginia's waterways call Virginia's Department of Health at 1-804-864-8182 or go to the their webpage:

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/dee/PublicHealthToxicology/Advisories/>

WARNING!:

Research has shown that some chemicals, such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and dioxins are found at high levels in a crab's hepatopancreas. Eating this part of the crab increases the amount of chemicals (i.e. dioxins, PCBs) that gets into a person's body and increases the risk of health effects associated with these toxins.

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