



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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## Mycobacteria infection in Chesapeake Bay Striped Bass Fact Sheet

- Fish with rashes or skin lesions may be infected with a kind of bacteria called nontuberculous mycobacteria.
- Handling uncooked fish with rashes or lesions may cause a skin infection in people with cuts or open sores on their hands.
- Always wash hands with soap and water (or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer) before and after handling uncooked fish.
- The best way to prevent skin infections caused by handling uncooked fish is by wearing gloves, and washing thoroughly with soap and water after coming into contact with uncooked fish.
- In general, fish handlers should avoid contact with unhealthy-looking fish. If an unhealthy-looking fish is caught, it is recommended that it be thrown back into the waters.
- There is no evidence that Chesapeake Bay fish (including striped bass) are unsafe to eat when cooked thoroughly. However, it is recommended that individuals not consume fish with any indication of illness.
- When cooking fish, the internal temperature of the fish must reach 145 degrees Fahrenheit and held at that temperature for at least 15 seconds.
- In general, fish prepared as sushi must be certified by a supplier as sashimi or sushi grade.
- Mycobacteria are found in many places in nature, including soil and water. Mycobacteria do not normally present a hazard to swimmers because most species are not adapted to infect humans and intact skin acts as an effective barrier against infection. Swimmers with open sores or wounds, however, should avoid swimming in any natural body of water, including the Chesapeake Bay, because a variety of microorganisms naturally exist in such waters and contamination of an open sore or wound by one of these organisms raises the possibility of acquiring a waterborne infection.