

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH UPDATES  
FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORIES**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has modified several existing fish consumption advisories and added five new advisories due to mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) contamination. Recent fish tissue sample results provided by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) show mercury and PCBs levels exceed the amount considered safe for long term human consumption.

**Mercury Advisories have been added or modified for the following water bodies:**

**Roanoke and Yadkin River Basins-**

- **Lovills Creek Lake (new)**
- **Dan River (modified)**

**Chowan and Dismal Swamp River Basin-**

- **Nottoway River (modified)**
- **Emporia Reservoir (new)**
- **Meherrin River (new)**

**Tennessee-Big Sandy River Basin-**

- **Big Cherry Reservoir (new)**
- **Lake Witten (new)**

**A PCB Advisory has been modified for the Dan River in the Roanoke and Yadkin River Basins.**

For complete details on these new or expanded advisories, including affected water body boundaries and localities, type of contaminant and species advisories visit the VDH fish consumption advisory page at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/dee/PublicHealthToxicology/Advisories/>

(more)

## Fish Advisory

Fish is an excellent source of protein and other nutrients. Most people's fish consumption does not cause a health concern. However, high levels of mercury in the bloodstream of unborn babies and young children may harm the developing nervous system and long-term consumption of fish contaminated with high levels of PCBs may increase the risk of cancer. "We want to protect people from adverse health effects of these contaminants," explained Michele Monti, director of the VDH Division of Environmental Epidemiology. "Fish consumption advisories alert people of contaminants present in the fish and the potential health effects that come from eating these fish, but do not prohibit people from eating fish. The advisories are intended to help people choose fish wisely."

Because of the increased risk to unborn babies and young children, women who are pregnant or who may soon become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children should not eat fish from these advisory areas to avoid ingesting mercury or PCBs.

These contaminants build up in fish tissue over years to levels that are many times greater than levels in the surrounding water. Therefore, while eating these fish may pose a health risk, swimming or skiing in the water is safe. "Recreational use of water in these rivers and lakes does not pose any risk of exposure to mercury or PCBs. We encourage people to continue to fish and enjoy the waters for recreation," explained Monti.

VDH recommends the following precautions to reduce any potential harmful effects from eating contaminated fish:

- Eat smaller, younger fish (within the legal limits). Younger fish are less likely to contain harmful levels of contaminants than larger, older fish.
- Eat fewer or smaller servings of fish.
- Try to eat different species of fish from various sources (i.e., different creeks, rivers and streams).
- Cleaning or cooking contaminated fish does not eliminate or reduce mercury. However, levels of PCBs in fish can be reduced by taking the following precautions:
  - Remove the skin, the fat from the belly and top and internal organs before cooking the fish.
  - Bake, broil or grill on an open rack to allow fats to drain away from the meat.
  - Discard the fats that cook out of the fish.
  - Avoid or reduce the amount of fish drippings or broth that is used to flavor the meal.
  - Eat less deep-fried fish, since frying seals contaminants into the fatty tissue.

For more information about fish consumption advisories, including frequently asked questions go to [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov)