

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health has modified several existing fish consumption advisories and added three new advisories due to polychlorinated biphenyls contamination and one new advisory due to mercury contamination.

Recent fish tissue sample results provided by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality show mercury and PCBs levels exceed the amount considered safe for long term human consumption.

PCB advisories have been added or modified for the following water bodies:

Chesapeake Bay and Small Coastal River Basins

- Lake Whitehurst (modified)
- Tabb Creek (modified)
- Poquoson River (new)
- Piankatank River (new)

York River Basin

- Pamunkey River (modified)
- Mattaponi River (modified)

James River Basin

- Mill Creek (new)

Potomac River Basin (modified)

- A mercury advisory has been added for the following water body:

York River Basin

- Reedy Creek (new)

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

www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/dee/PublicHealthToxicology/Advisories/.

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 the unborn 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," said Dr. Julia Murphy, acting director of the VDH Division of Environmental Epidemiology and State Public Health Veterinarian. "Fish consumption advisories alert people to contaminants present in the fish and to 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 health 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.

Over time, these contaminants build up in fish tissue 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 waterskiing is safe. "Recreational use of water in these rivers and lakes does not pose any risk of exposure to mercury or PCBs and we encourage people to continue to fish and enjoy the waters for recreation," Murphy said.

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. Levels of PCBs in fish can be reduced by taking these precautions:
 - Remove the skin, the fat from the belly and top and internal organs before cooking the fish.
 - Bake, broil or grill fish on an open rack to allow fats to drain away.
 - 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, as frying seals contaminants into the fatty tissue.

For more information about fish consumption advisories, including frequently asked questions, go to <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov>.

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