

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ISSUES FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORY FOR LAKE GASTON

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health has issued an advisory on walleye fish consumption due to mercury contamination in Lake Gaston.

Recent fish tissue sample results from the North Carolina Division of Public Health show mercury levels in walleye fish exceed the amount considered safe for long term human consumption. As Virginia and North Carolina share boundaries for Lake Gaston, the Virginia Department of Health is taking the prudent measure of issuing an advisory.

VDH advises the consumption of no more than two meals a month of walleye taken from Lake Gaston. Virginia's advisory stretches from John H. Kerr Dam downstream 18 miles to the Virginia-North Carolina state line. For additional details, visit the VDH fish consumption advisory page at www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/dee/PublicHealthToxicology/Advisories/. For more on North Carolina's findings on recent fish sampling, visit the North Carolina Public Health Web site at <http://www.rabies.ncdhhs.gov/epi/fish/>.

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.

Fish consumption advisories alert people to contaminants present in affected fish species but do not prohibit people from eating fish. Because of the increased health risk to the very young and women who are pregnant or who may soon become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children should not eat fish from this advisory area to avoid ingesting mercury.

Over time, mercury builds up in fish tissue to levels that are many times greater than levels in the surrounding water. Therefore, while eating walleye from the area under advisory may pose a health risk, swimming or waterskiing is safe.

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.

For more information about fish consumption advisories, including frequently asked questions, go to www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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