

SWAMP Newsletter

Sound science for informed water quality management

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New Safe Eating Advisory for Fish in California Coastal Waters

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The CalEPA Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment is the primary State entity for the evaluation of risks posed by chemical contaminants in the environment. Its mission is to protect and enhance public health and the environment through the scientific evaluation of the risks posed by hazardous substances. OEHHA works in close partnership with SWAMP when designing statewide fish contamination studies so that the resulting data can be used to develop safe fish consumption advisories for the public.

The new coastal fish advisory (see poster on next page) marks the first time the State has provided safe eating guidelines for three dozen species of fish across hundreds of miles of the California coast, stretching from the Oregon border to Mexico. The advisory focuses on levels of mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and covers many commonly consumed species, including sanddabs, croaker, surfperch, and rockfish. Combined with more than 70 existing advisories that cover hundreds of lakes, rivers, bays, and reservoirs, the State now provides health-based guidance for the great majority of places where people catch and eat fish in California. Much of the data used to develop these advisories were generated by SWAMP's bioaccumulation monitoring program.





The coastal advisory states that small flatfish species, such as Spotted Turbot and Speckled Sanddab, can be safely eaten as many as six times a week by all population groups, while consumption of other fish species listed in the advisory should be limited to four times a week or less. Women ages 18-45 and children ages 1-17 should refrain from eating shark and four rockfish species that are high in mercury. Seven other species of rockfish have moderate levels of mercury and can be safely eaten once per week by women 18-45 and children 1-17. Women 46 and older, and men 18 and older can eat as many as four servings of these species per week.

This advisory applies only to recreational fishing in the coastal waters of California, excluding enclosed bays (such as Morro Bay) and the area from Ventura Harbor to San Mateo Point (near San Clemente), which have their own advisories. State coastal waters are defined as extending three nautical miles from the mean low tide line, and three nautical miles beyond the outermost islands (for example, the Channel or Farallon islands), including all waters between those islands and the coast, from the Oregon/ California border to the United States/Mexico border.

OEHHA also offers an advisory for Chinook salmon, striped bass, and other species that migrate between different waterbodies and a statewide advisory for lakes and reservoirs that do not have site-specific advisories.

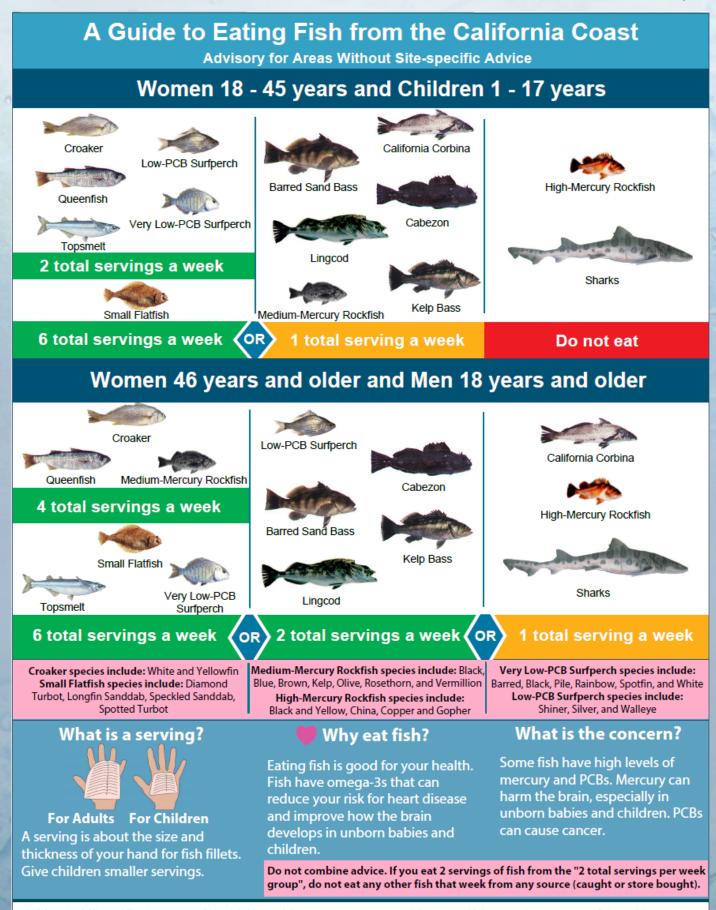
SWAMP is planning to conduct repeated surveys of coastal fish on a 10-year cycle in order to address information gaps and track trends. A second survey is planned, with a multi-year effort, for 2018.

The coastal advisory, as well as safe eating guidelines for other fish species found in California waterbodies, are available here.

(View advisory poster on next page)



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