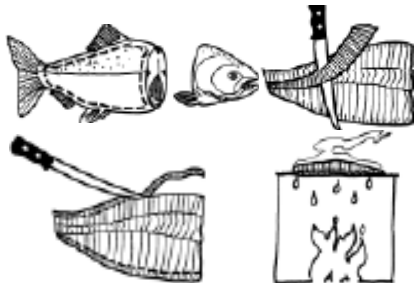


## Properly clean and cook your fish

There are healthy ways to prepare fish that will help to reduce your exposure to PCBs and chlordane. Mercury, however, cannot be removed from fish. When you cook sport-fish, follow this advice:

- Clean the fish and trim away the fatty areas such as the belly, top of the back, and the dark meat along the side.



- Remove or puncture the skin before cooking to allow the fat to drain off.
- Broil, grill, roast, or steam the fish to allow fat to drain away. If it is a large, fatty type of fish, frying is not recommended.
- When broiling, grilling, or roasting the fish, throw away the fatty drippings. (Fat is where most of the chlordane and PCBs are stored.) Do not use them to make soup.

## Where can I get more information?

Illinois Department of Public Health  
Division of Environmental Health

- Visit [dph.illinois.gov](http://dph.illinois.gov) and search "[current fish advisory map](#)."
- Call - 217.782.5830 or Toll free 888.522.1282
- Email - [DPH.Tox@illinois.gov](mailto:DPH.Tox@illinois.gov)

Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Fisheries Resources

- Visit [ifishillinois.org](http://ifishillinois.org)
- Call - 217.782.6302

FDA's and EPA's Meal Advice for Fish Consumption

- Visit [www.FDA.gov/fishadvice](http://www.FDA.gov/fishadvice) and [www.EPA.gov/fishadvice](http://www.EPA.gov/fishadvice)

*This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under assistance agreement GLOOE02467 - 1 to IDPH. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does the EPA endorse trade names or recommend the use of commercial products mentioned in this document.*

# An Expectant Mother's Guide to Eating Illinois Fish

What you should know if you are pregnant, planning to be pregnant, or nursing a baby.



Fish are a healthy, low-fat source of protein, but some Illinois fish contain harmful contaminants. This is a special concern if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or nursing a baby. You cannot tell if a fish is contaminated by looking at, smelling, or tasting it. You also cannot tell if a fish is contaminated by how "clean" the river or lake appears to be. It is important to know which fish are healthy to eat and how to cook fish to reduce exposure to contamination.

## How do I know which fish are contaminated?

Illinois agencies develop annual fish advisories. They list different fish found in various bodies of water that may be contaminated. The advisories tell how often you can eat contaminated fish. If you eat fish caught in Illinois lakes and rivers, it is important to check the online fish advisories. This will help protect you and your baby.

## Reduce your exposure to fish contaminants

### Avoid older and bigger fish -

They have had more time to build up contaminants in their bodies.

### Choose fish that do not eat other fish -

Fish such as walleye and northern pike tend to have higher levels of mercury because they may eat other contaminated fish.

### Avoid fish with a lot of fat -

Fatty fish such as carp and catfish tend to collect more chlordane and PCBs in their fat.

## What contaminants are in Illinois fish?

Illinois has established fish advisories for PCBs, chlordane, and mercury.

- PCBs are man-made oils that are no longer used in the U.S. They are known to cause low birth weights and delays in physical development.
- Chlordane is a pesticide that was used for agriculture and termite control prior to 1988. It can affect the nervous system, the digestive system, and the liver.
- Mercury is a metal that mainly comes from coal-burning power plants and from household and industrial waste. It causes problems with the nervous system that can lead to learning difficulties.

PCBs, chlordane, and mercury break down slowly in the environment. They collect in soil, water, and sediments. Fish that live in waters contaminated by these substances can accumulate the contaminants in their bodies. Over time, the amount of contaminants can build up in the fish. When we eat the fish, we are exposed to the contamination.

Even if you are not pregnant, reducing your exposure is important. It takes a long time for PCBs, chlordane, and mercury to leave your body once you have been exposed. What you eat now can have effects several years later. For this reason, it is important to always follow the guidance of the fish advisories.

## Steps you can take to protect you and your baby

The health benefits of eating fish outweigh the risk from exposure to contaminants if you -

- follow the guidance of the Illinois fish advisory,
- carefully choose the fish that you eat while you are pregnant or nursing,
- make changes in how you eat fish (what kind, from where, how often),
- prepare the fish to reduce contamination.

## Limit your consumption of contaminated fish when pregnant or breastfeeding

If you know the body of water you fish at is contaminated, follow the advice by eating fewer meals containing contaminated fish. Substitute store-bought fish following EPA and FDA's meal advice, or fish from a less contaminated area.

