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 and search current fish advisory map.
- Call - 217.782.5830 or Toll free 888.522.1282
- Email - DPH.Tox@illinois.gov

Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Division of Fisheries Resources
- Visit ifishillinois.org
- Call - 217.782.6302

FDA’s and EPA’s Meal Advice for Fish Consumption
- Visit www.FDA.gov/fishadvice and www.EPA.gov/fishadvice

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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.

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.