



CARIBOU

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH – CONTAMINANTS FACT SHEETS



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CARIBOU?

Caribou are land-based animals. Land-based animals are less likely to build up high levels of contaminants than marine animals (like beluga or ringed seal). Caribou eat plants and are low on the food chain. Animals that do not eat other animals also tend to have low levels of contaminants.

Caribou have been sampled for contaminants in the NWT. Their meat consistently shows low levels of contaminants; however older caribou may have higher levels of contaminants in their organs due to a process called bioaccumulation (see *Contaminants Overview fact sheet* - <http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca>).

Caribou have been tested for radionuclides (see *Radionuclides fact sheet* - <http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca>) because they are readily absorbed into plants that caribou eat, such as lichen. Some radionuclides come naturally from the environment; however, other types (such as Cesium-137) come from human activities. Testing of nuclear weapons in the 1960s was a major source of radionuclides, and the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident contributed small amounts. Radionuclides in caribou and in humans have been declining since the 1960s in the NWT. Caribou were tested after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident in 2011 and were shown not to have been affected by this event.

CARIBOU IS GOOD FOR US!

Most parts of the caribou provide high levels of protein and iron. Protein is needed to build and repair all parts of the body. Iron is used to make healthy blood. The liver and stomach are a rich source of vitamin A, which helps keep skin, bones and teeth healthy.

For more nutritional information on caribou, see the GNWT Health and Social Service's Nutritional Food Fact Sheets Series (<http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca>).

IS CARIBOU SAFE TO EAT?

Yes! Caribou is safe to eat. It is also one of the healthiest foods available. The benefits of consuming caribou are much greater than the risks of contaminant exposure.

Caribou liver and kidney may have higher levels of certain contaminants, like cadmium (see *Cadmium fact sheet* - <http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca>). Check the GNWT Health and

Social Services website for current consumption notices (<http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca>). **By following consumption notices you can safely enjoy all traditional foods.** The most effective way to minimize exposure to cadmium is to stop smoking and to avoid second hand smoke.

