



General Fish Consumption Guidelines for the NWT

Why eat fish?

Eating fish contributes to a healthy, nutritious diet. Fish is an excellent source of protein, calcium, vitamins and omega-3 fats which help maintain your health! Getting out on the land to fish is also a great way to stay active.

Can fish be contaminated by chemicals in the environment?

Fish, like other foods, can contain varying levels of chemical contaminants such as mercury. An environmental contaminant is any chemical in a food that would not normally be present. Environmental contaminants can result from human releases of contaminants to the environment, or from natural activities, such as forest fires, which allow contaminants to enter the food chain.

Are these contaminants harmful?

The mere presence of a contaminant may not always be harmful. For example, small amounts of mercury are found in wild and store bought fish and usually are not harmful to consume; however some fish contain higher amounts of mercury which could put some people at risk if they eat too much.

Which fish contain more mercury than others?

Predatory fish that feed on other fish and reach a large size – like walleye, lake trout and northern pike – sometimes contain higher levels of mercury. This is usually if they are old and large. Other fish species – like whitefish, cisco, suckers, grayling, arctic char, and inconnu – generally have very low levels of mercury, even in larger fish.

Should pregnant women eat fish?

Yes. Regular fish consumption by pregnant women and nursing mothers is overall beneficial for healthy prenatal and early childhood development. The developing fetus, infants and young children may be more sensitive to the effects of mercury. It is therefore important for pregnant women to continue eating fish but to do so in a way that minimizes mercury exposure. Women who eat fish are also encouraged to continue breastfeeding to provide infants the best start to a healthy life.

Non-predatory fish or fish lower on the food chain, such as whitefish and arctic char, are very low in mercury and are a safe and nutritious choice for women of child bearing age and children.

Unless there is specific guidance for a particular lake, the following consumption guidelines may be used by women of childbearing age and children under 12 to safely consume predatory fish in the Northwest Territories while limiting exposure to mercury. These

guidelines represent the maximum amount of each fish that an individual could consume without exceeding mercury intake recommendations. This means that if you consume the maximum recommended amount of lake trout, for example, you would not want to also be eating northern pike and walleye. If you reduced your lake trout consumption, you could increase your northern pike and walleye consumption.

It is important to know that biomonitoring studies have measured mercury in people in the Northwest Territories and have shown that people who eat fish are not at a high risk from mercury exposure.

Lake Trout



Length	Women of Childbearing Age	Children Aged 5-11	Children Aged 1-4
Less than 60 cm	24 servings/month	12 servings/month	6 servings/month
60 cm or larger	20 servings/month	8 servings/month	4 servings/month

Northern Pike



Length	Women of Childbearing Age	Children Aged 5-11	Children Aged 1-4
Less than 60 cm	24 servings/month	8 servings/month	4 servings/month
60 cm or larger	12 servings/month	4 servings/month	2 servings/month

Walleye



Length	Women of Childbearing Age	Children Aged 5-11	Children Aged 1-4
Less than 45 cm	14 servings/month	6 servings/month	2 servings/month
45 cm or larger	6 servings/month	3 servings/month	2 servings/month

What is a serving?

A serving is equal to 75 grams and fits in the palm of your hand. The photo here shows an example of a serving.



For specific fish consumption guidelines on NWT lakes that have been tested for mercury, please visit the GNWT Department of Health and Social Services website at <http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/health/environmental-health/mercury-levels-fish>.

For specific fish consumption guidelines in the Yellowknife area related to arsenic, please visit the GNWT Department of Health and Social Services website at <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/arsenic-lake-water-around-yellowknife>.

For more information on fish species and regulations, consult the NWT Sport Fishing Guide at <https://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/en/services/apply-fishing-licence>.

If you would like this information in another official language, contact us at 1-855-846-9601.
Si vous voulez ces renseignements dans une autre langue officielle, communiquez avec nous au
1-855-846-9601.