

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

Public Health Advisory

YELLOWKNIFE (June 16, 2010) – Dr. Kami Kandola, Chief Public Health Officer, is advising residents of the Northwest Territories of an increase in mercury levels in four lakes.

Thereby, a public health notice is in effect, recommending people limit the quantity of fish they eat from the following lakes:

- Trout Lake - Dehcho
- Cli Lake - Dehcho
- Ste Therese – Sahtu
- Kelly Lake - Sahtu

Generally, fish is a good source of nutrition and high in protein, Vitamin B and omega-3 fatty acids. The health benefits of eating fish outweigh the potential risks. Mercury is a contaminant that can be found in fish. Levels of mercury differ from lake to lake and can be due to human activities or to natural causes.

Health Canada has established guidelines on what levels of mercury are acceptable to consume. To reduce exposure, it is recommended that people adhere to the following recommendations:

- Eat smaller fish
- Eat more fish that are lower in the food chain, such as whitefish or grayling and eat less that are higher in the food chain such as walleye, northern pike or lake trout

Based on Canada's Food Guide, one serving of fish is considered to be 75 grams, about the size of a deck of cards. Below are recommendations specific to each lake:

Trout Lake – The median mercury level is 0.58 parts per million (ppm) for lake trout.

For lake trout less than 60 cm in total length, levels meet Health Canada average consumption guidelines.

For lake trout greater than 60 cm in total length, the general population should consume no more than 150 grams (0.3 lbs) per week. This is equally to two servings a fish per week. Pregnant or breastfeeding mothers should eat no more than 150 grams (0.3 lbs) per month. This is equal to two servings of fish per month. Children between five and 11 years of age can eat up to 125 grams

(0.276 lbs) per month. This is equal to 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ servings per month. Young children between one and four years of age should eat no more than 75 grams (0.165 lbs) per month. This is equal to one serving per month.

Lac Ste. Therese - This lake is accessible only in winter by snowmobile. It is approximately 191.7 km from Tulita. The median mercury level is 3.5 ppm in walleye and 2.3 ppm in lake trout.

The mercury levels have almost tripled from 1992 levels. It is recommended no predatory fish be consumed from this lake, regardless of size.

Kelly Lake – This lake is approximately 30 km away from Norman Wells. The median mercury level is 0.87 ppm in lake trout.

For lake trout of any length, the general population should consume no more than 150 grams (0.3 lbs) per week. This is equal to two servings of fish per week. Pregnant or breastfeeding mothers should eat no more than 150 grams (0.3 lbs) per month. This is equal to two servings of fish per month. Children between five and 11 years of age can eat up to 125 grams (0.276 lbs) per month. This is equal to 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ servings per month. Young children between one and four years of age should eat no more than 75 grams (0.165 lbs) per month. This is equal to one serving per month.

Cli Lake – This lake is approximately 115.9 km west of Fort Simpson. The mean mercury level is 1.99 ppm for lake trout.

All lake trout fish caught in this lake have been 60 cm or greater. It is therefore recommended to “catch and release” and avoid consumption.

No recommendation can be made for lake trout fish less than 60 cm due to lack of recent data. However 1998 data on lake trout, showed levels were below average consumption levels for fish less than 60 cm. It would still be prudent to eat primarily young non-predatory fish.

Please also note that all drinking water is tested annually for metals. To date, there has been no detectable presence of mercury.

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