

Eat Safe Fish FAQs

How do I know which fish are the “safe” fish to eat?

Each year, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) tests for chemicals in filets from fish caught in lakes and rivers around Michigan. The results from those tests are used to write the **MDHHS Eat Safe Fish Guide**. The **MDHHS Eat Safe Fish Guide** can help you learn which Michigan fish are safe to eat up to three or four times a week and which fish are better to avoid.

If you are a healthy adult who is not planning on having children in the next several years and you don't fish in an area that has “Do Not Eat” signs posted by MDHHS, then it is usually OK to eat most Michigan fish a one or two times a year without looking them up in the **Eat Safe Fish Guide** first. MDHHS does recommend that you at least follow the S.A.F.E. fishing tips listed below:



If you don't eat a lot of fish or have access to the **Eat Safe Fish Guide** when you're fishing, you can still choose cleaner fish to eat if you remember to stay **S.A.F.E.:**



S Smaller fish are better. (Bluegill, yellow perch, and other panfish are *usually* the best choice.)

A Avoid large predator fish and bottom feeders. (Call for the **Guide** if you go after these fish.)

F Fat should be removed. (Some chemicals can be removed with the fat.)

E Eat fish that have been grilled or broiled. (So that more fat and chemicals can drip away.)

If you eat a lot of fish and want a free copy of the **Eat Safe Fish Guide**, call MDHHS at 1-800-648-6942 or visit www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish.

Will I be able to tell if the fish are safe to eat by looking at them?

No. You will not be able to see any of the chemicals, even mercury, in the fish. To find the chemicals, MDHHS tests the fish in a laboratory. MDHHS only tests the filet of the fish - the part most people eat - for chemicals.

You can't see the chemicals in the water, either. Some very clear lakes or rivers can still have fish with higher levels of chemicals. If you eat a lot of Michigan fish, you can check the **MDHHS Eat Safe Fish Guide** to find the safest options from the lake or river that you're fishing.



Is it safe to touch a fish that has chemicals in it?



Yes. You do not need to wear gloves or worry about getting the chemicals on you. They will not absorb into your skin from the fish.

Catch and release is almost always safe in Michigan regardless of where you're fishing. However, sometimes your local health department may issue a temporary warning against touching the water - including the fish that live in the water - because of problems like sewage overflow or harmful algae blooms.

You can contact your local health department or visit <http://www.deq.state.mi.us/beach/> for local warnings about water quality.

Why should I use the *Eat Safe Fish Guide*?

If you eat a lot of fish, you can possibly also be eating chemicals, like mercury, PCBs, PFOS, or dioxins. These chemicals can stay in your body for a long time.

The *Eat Safe Fish Guide* is designed to protect everybody - men, women, or children - who eat fish on a regular basis.

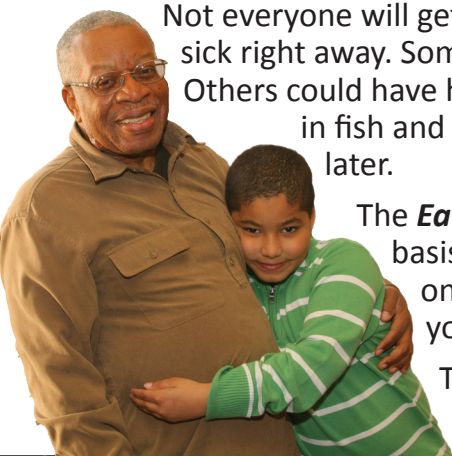
Using the *Eat Safe Fish Guide* and following the *MI Serving* suggestions will keep you from getting too many chemicals in your body at once. Scientists set the limits in the *Eat Safe Fish Guide* so that you are protected from possible health problems from the chemicals no matter how long they stay in your body.

Chemical in fish	Possible health problem if too much is eaten
Selenium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> while needed in small amounts for our bodies to work well, too much can cause problems, like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> hair loss loss of fingernails fatigue irritability mild nerve damage
Toxaphene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> immune system can be harmed
Mercury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> brain development can be harmed in fetuses and children heart function can be harmed in older adults immune system can be harmed
Dioxins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> linked to the development of cancer linked to the development of diabetes fertility can be harmed thyroid function can be harmed
DDT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> linked to the development of cancer linked to the development of diabetes
PCBs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> brain development can be harmed in fetuses and children linked to the development of cancer linked to the development of diabetes immune system can be harmed
PFOS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> thyroid function can be harmed brain development can be harmed in fetuses and children

Not everyone will get sick from eating these chemicals. The chemicals in fish also won't make you sick right away. Some people will be fine after years of eating fish with these chemicals in them. Others could have health problems. It is difficult to know who might get sick from the chemicals in fish and who won't. By making the safe choice now, you won't have to worry about later.

The *Eat Safe Fish Guide* is designed to protect any person who eats fish on a regular basis. If you are a healthy adult who is not pregnant and only eat Michigan fish once or twice a year from waters that are not posted with MDHHS signs, then you don't *need* to use the *Eat Safe Fish Guide*.

The S.A.F.E. fishing tips and the 3Cs in the *Eat Safe Fish in Michigan* brochure will help the occasional Michigan fish eater avoid eating too many chemicals.



Have questions about buying or catching safe fish?

For more information or to get a copy of the *Eat Safe Fish Guide* or the *Eat Safe Fish in Michigan* brochure, please call the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services at 1-800-648-6942 or visit: www.michigan.gov/eatsafefish

