

## **Delta Mercury Exposure Reduction Program (MERP)**

### **Summary of Educational Messages for Community-Based Groups**

- **Fish (including shellfish) are highly nutritious and are an important part of a healthy diet.**
  - Fish are high in protein, low in fat, and a good source of important nutrients, including healthy fats called omega-3 fatty acids that are good for adults and children.
  - In adults, eating at least 8 ounces of a variety of fish per week, including some high in omega-3s, may prevent heart disease.
  - The developing fetus also needs omega-3 fatty acids for development of the brain and eyes.
  - By eating at least 8 ounces of fish per week while pregnant and breastfeeding, mothers can pass these nutrients on to their babies and helps to keep them healthy.
- **Everyone should be careful to limit or avoid fish that have high levels of the toxic chemicals mercury or polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).**
  - Mercury is harmful to the brain and nervous system, and PCBs might cause cancer.
- **It is especially important for women ages 18-45 and children ages 1-17 to avoid eating fish that have high levels of mercury because babies (including the developing fetus) and children are more sensitive to the harmful effects.**
  - Because babies and children's brains are still developing, exposure to mercury can cause them to learn more slowly.
- **Women ages 18-45 (potential childbearing years) should eat fish during pregnancy for the benefits to the fetus, but they should choose fish low in chemicals and high in omega-3s.**
- **The levels of mercury in fish in the Central and South Delta (south of Highway 12) are generally *lower* than in many other places in CA, including the Delta north of highway 12, Sacramento River, San Joaquin River (south of Stockton), and many CA lakes and reservoirs.**
- **Some types of fish have higher levels of chemical compared to others. Striped bass and sturgeon caught in the Delta are high in mercury and PCBs and should not be eaten by women ages 18-45 or children ages 1-17.**
  - Striped bass and sturgeon caught in rivers, bays, and the ocean are also high in mercury and PCBs; bass and carp in many CA lakes and reservoirs are high in mercury.
- **Some types of fish are low in mercury and can be eaten more often.**
  - These include: rainbow and steelhead trout, and American shad in the Delta; catfish, bluegill, and other sunfish in the Central or South Delta; rainbow trout from most CA lakes and reservoirs; and Chinook (king) salmon from the Sacramento River and Mokelumne River. Always follow the fishing regulations wherever you fish.
  - Women 18-45 and children ages 1-17 can eat 2 servings a week (about 12 ounces\*) of these types of fish.
- **Some fish from stores and restaurants also have high levels of mercury. Women 18-45 and children 1-17, should follow the federal guidelines for the fish they buy.**
  - Do not eat shark, swordfish, tilefish or king mackerel because these are high in mercury.
  - Eat 8 to 12 ounces\* each week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are low in mercury.
  - Limit white (albacore) tuna to 6 ounces\* per week.
- **You can't tell the amount of chemicals in a fish by tasting or looking at it. To protect your health, and the health of your loved ones, follow the recommendations in the advisories.**

\*Serve children portions appropriate for their age and calorie needs.