

Women's Healthcare Provider Outreach

Eating fish is healthy.

The federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) both acknowledge that fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy and balanced diet. They contain high quality protein and other essential nutrients. Fish are low in fat and contain omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids help in the development of the brain, eyes and nervous systems of babies and they help to reduce chances of high blood pressure in adults.

Almost all states, including New Hampshire, have freshwater fish advisories that recommend limiting the amount of freshwater fish a person eats due to mercury contamination. Additionally, there are consumption advisories for safely eating saltwater fish. Certain species of fish, such as swordfish, shark, king mackerel and Atlantic tilefish, have been shown to contain mercury concentrations above safe levels for consumption by women of childbearing age and young children. For all other people, federal guidance suggests limiting consumption of these species to two meals per month. DES includes information on saltwater fish and freshwater fish in the New Hampshire fish advisory.

The goal of the FDA and EPA fish advisory is to ensure that women continue to eat fish and shellfish because of the nutritional benefits, while encouraging them to follow the fish advisory to reduce mercury exposure. Improved communication will evolve the understanding of the message from "don't eat fish" into "eat healthy fish." With funding through the EPA New England Healthy Communities grant program, DES has created a fish and mercury outreach brochure targeted for women of child bearing age, pregnant, and lactating women for dissemination by women's health care providers.

The effort included a preliminary evaluation of the communication effectiveness of the former brochure, and determination of the methods used by women's health care providers to disseminate fish consumption advice.