



News Release

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Study finds mercury levels in canned “light” tuna are lower than in albacore

Choosing “light” tuna will reduce exposure to mercury

OLYMPIA — Mercury levels in canned “light” tuna are three times lower than in canned albacore tuna (also called white tuna), according to a recent Department of Health study. Babies of women who eat fish with large amounts of mercury and young children who eat such fish are at greater risk of developmental problems that can affect their ability to learn.

The new information may help consumers take additional steps to reduce their exposure to mercury. Canned “light” tuna is usually labeled “chunk light” or “solid light.” While cans of “white” tuna contain only albacore, light tuna can be a mix of several different types of tuna.

“Fish is a healthy food, and a variety of fish is an important part of a good diet” said Dr. Maxine Hayes, State Health Officer. “What we have learned through this study can help us make wise choices on fish consumption. It tells us that eating light tuna and avoiding albacore tuna reduces our exposure to mercury, and that’s important information.”

Almost 300 cans of tuna collected from 83 randomly selected stores across the state were analyzed at the Department of Ecology laboratory. Albacore tuna had an average of 215 parts per billion (ppb) of mercury, compared to an average of 57 ppb in canned light tuna. There were no significant differences between solid and chunk tuna, or between tuna packed in water versus oil. It has been 10 years since similar studies were done, and they did not distinguish between the different types of canned tuna.

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The agency [Fish Facts Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/fish/) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/fish/>) has more information. Additional data are being collected by other states and the Food and Drug Administration, and may lead the Department of Health to revise its consumption recommendations based on the type of canned tuna, whether albacore or light tuna.

The study was funded through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as part of a program to help develop an Environmental Health Tracking Network. This program will improve the state's ability to access and analyze information about environmental contaminants and health problems.

"Fish is an excellent low-fat food, a great source of protein, vitamins and minerals," Hayes adds. "While we don't want to scare people away from eating all fish, women who are – or who might one day become pregnant – should choose fish that are low in mercury."

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for *a healthy dose of information*.