

## How will the information be used?

The Alaska Division of Public Health monitors mercury levels over time to help give the best dietary advice to women and children and to assure the safety of the population most at risk- unborn children. By comparing levels over time, we will know if mercury levels are changing.

## Should I stop eating fish?

**NO!** Mercury levels are very low in the kinds of fish most Alaskans eat. The levels found in Alaska salmon are among the lowest in the world.

## Is fish a healthy choice?

**YES!** Fish is a high-protein, lowfat food that should be part of a healthy diet. Also, fish is an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are very important for a healthy pregnancy and a growing child.

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[www.eatfish.alaska.gov](http://www.eatfish.alaska.gov)

Statewide

# Hair Mercury Biomonitoring

Program



*Information for women of childbearing age*

State of Alaska  
Department of Health & Social Services  
Division of Public Health  
Section of Epidemiology  
Environmental Public Health Program

## **The State of Alaska Division of Public Health is offering free confidential hair mercury testing to women of childbearing age (15–45 years) and children.**

### **Where does mercury come from?**

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and has always been present in fish and marine mammals. Mercury is released into the air through coal burning and industrial pollution, and reaches the Arctic mainly through air and water currents. There is also some naturally occurring mercury in our land. Mercury is taken up by fish and passed on to people who eat fish.

### **Why are we measuring mercury levels?**

High levels of mercury can cause human health problems, especially in fetuses and young children. The good news is that levels of mercury in Alaska are low.

### **Who can participate?**

All women age 15-45 and children are eligible to have their health care provider submit a hair sample for mercury testing.



### **Why are we collecting hair?**

Mercury is incorporated into hair as it grows and remains in hair for a long time. The level of mercury in human hair can give us information about exposure to mercury from the diet. Having their hair tested allows individual Alaskan women and children to learn about their mercury exposure and whether dietary changes may be necessary.

### **What will happen if I choose to participate?**

If you choose to participate, a small sample of your hair about an 1/8 inch in diameter (about the size of this dot ●) will be cut at the back of your head close to your scalp.

The sample will be sent to a lab to be tested for mercury. Your health care provider will receive a letter with your results which s/he can discuss with you.

### **What should I know?**

- Participation is completely voluntary.
- The place where the hair is cut should not be noticeable.
- There is no charge for the mercury test.
- Your results are confidential.



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### **How do I participate?**

Talk to your health care provider if you would like more information. You can also contact:

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Section of Epidemiology  
Environmental Public Health Program  
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Anchorage, AK 99503

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