Why are we concerned about mercury?

Mercury is a neurotoxin - at high levels it can damage the developing brains of babies (including babies in the womb) and children. Mercury levels in most Alaska fish are low, so any health effects would be very subtle. Still, health officials recommend a margin of safety to protect our children's health.

Should I worry about eating fish?

Overall, mercury levels in Alaska fish are low, so the only people who need to think about limiting the amount of fish they eat are women who are or can become pregnant, nursing mothers, and children age 12 years and under. Women and children can still get the benefits of eating fish by choosing to eat fish that are low in mercury, like salmon.

Measuring Mercury in Humans

Although mercury concentrations in fish can give us an idea of possible mercury exposure, Alaska has a program that tests for actual mercury levels in humans. If you are a woman of child-bearing age, you can get your hair tested and find out your own mercury levels - for free!

When Deciding What to Eat, Remember...

Subsistence foods, including almost all fish, are better for you and less expensive than store-bought foods. Also, the subsistence way of life helps keep Alaska Native cultures healthy and traditional ways alive.

Where does mercury in Alaska come from?

- Anthropogenic (human-caused) sources such as global air pollution from burning fuels and garbage, and mining runoff
- Natural sources such as forest fires, volcanoes, and local bedrock weathering into streams

In 2006, with the help of subsistence fishermen, we collected 104 pike from sites in the Buckland, Kobuk, Noatak, and Selawik River drainages.

For more information on mercury in pike contact Angela Matz (angela_matz@fws.gov, 907-456-0442), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 101-12th Ave., Room 110, Fairbanks, AK 99701.