

Can You Eat That Striped Bass From the Hudson River?

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Striped bass are one of the most well-known fish in the entire Hudson River, prized by generations of fishermen. It's prized not only for its size (they can be upwards of 30+ pounds) and the exhilaration of catching one, but it's also prized for its culinary value. Surveys of fisherman done over the past ten years by the Hudson River Fish Advisory Outreach Project reveal that 75% of people who say they eat Hudson River fish, say they eat striped bass.

For decades the Hudson River was polluted with the industrial chemical Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) which builds up in fish and is stored in their fat tissue. Most anglers consider striped bass "ocean fish," believing they spend only a short portion of their lives in the Hudson River during their annual spring spawning run. This is why they think that striped bass are not contaminated with PCBs, compared to other Hudson River fish.

However, tagging studies done by researchers showing the migration of striped bass indicate that some striped bass stay in the Hudson River for much longer than previously thought.

Researchers have discovered a "resident population" that stays in the Hudson River, especially between Troy and Catskill, for much longer than their spawning run. Sampling of striped bass for PCBs by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) over many decades shows that these fish have PCB levels often three to four times higher than other striped bass found south of the Rip Van Winkle Bridge in Catskill, as high as catfish. The study data shows your chances of catching a striped bass with high PCB levels is much less if you fish south of the Rip Van Winkle Bridge in Catskill. How do you know if the striped bass you catch is one of those resident fish? The answer is - you don't! For this reason, the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) has a "do not eat" advisory on recreationally caught striped bass between Troy and Catskill and different restrictions south of Catskill. This advisory has been in effect for more than 20 years.

Where You Fish Matters

Even though striped bass are a migratory fish, data collected over decades shows striped bass caught between Troy and Catskill can have PCBs well above the recommended NYS DOH guidelines. Your chances of catching a striped bass with high levels of PCBs is much lower if you fish south of Catskill. So, if you plan on eating the striped bass you catch, make sure to fish between the Rip Van Winkle Bridge in Catskill and the NYC Battery. (Want to see the data? Visit www.health.ny.gov/fish/stripedbass.htm.)

Who You Are Matters

Women under 50 (during their childbearing years) and children should not eat any striped bass from the Hudson River. Women who eat highly contaminated fish and game and become pregnant may have an increased risk of having children who are slower to develop and learn. Some contaminants may be passed on to infants in mother's milk. Exposure to contaminants may

also have a greater effect on young children than adults. Women over 50 and men may face fewer health risks from some chemicals. For that reason, the advice for women over age 50 and men over age 15 allows them to eat more kinds of sportfish and more often.

The Bottom Line

No one should eat striped bass from the Hudson River caught between Troy and Catskill. Consider practicing catch and release fishing. South of Catskill men over 15 and women over 50 can eat up to one, half-pound meal per month of striped bass. Women under 50 and children under 15 should not eat any striped bass from the Hudson River.

Find out more about Hudson River striped bass and PCB levels in Hudson River fish here:

www.health.ny.gov/fish/strippedbass.htm.

For a complete listing of fish consumption advice for New York State, visit:

www.health.ny.gov/fish.

References: 1. Hudson River Fish Advisory Outreach Project,

www.health.ny.gov/hudsonriverfish

2. Can You Eat That Striped Bass From the Hudson?

www.health.ny.gov/fish/strippedbass.htm