

# Should Tuna Be Banned from School Lunches?

By [MELINDA JOHNSON](#)

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[Canned tuna](#) made news last week as the star in a scandalous debate: A coalition of consumer groups is reportedly urging schools to take tuna [off the lunch menu](#). The reason? A recently published study that reported higher amounts of mercury than expected, as well as large variances in the levels of mercury, based on tests of several different brands and types of canned tuna.

The problem with these headlines is that they aren't exactly true. The report, titled *Tuna Surprise: Mercury in School Lunches*, doesn't actually call for tuna to be banished from the lunch menu. Rather, the authors issue key recommendations for schools, as well as parents, to reduce children's possible over-exposure to mercury from canned tuna. The recommendations are a bit more stringent than current federal guidelines on [seafood](#) in children's diets, but they certainly [don't ask schools to completely ditch tuna](#).

For close to a decade, consumers have been warned about certain types of fish that may contain high amounts of mercury—the U.S. Food and Drug Administration even has an official guidance policy on the topic. The FDA recommends that people who are most vulnerable (pregnant women, infants, and children) be cautious about the type and amount of seafood they eat. In general, canned tuna has been considered safe to eat once or twice weekly; canned [light tuna](#) has been considered a bit safer than canned albacore tuna, but both are allowed in the diet of a child, according to the federal guidelines.

The alternative guidelines published and promoted by the consumer group coalition offer much more detailed guidance to parents and schools on what the authors call "risk-management advice." The most alarming of the recent study's findings were that some children, called "tuna lovers" by the authors, may be getting [dangerously high doses of mercury](#), because they are simply eating too much canned tuna. For these children, the report recommends that parents request a blood test for mercury levels and try to cut down overall tuna intake.

Here are some of the key guidelines released in this report:

- Children should never be fed canned [albacore](#) tuna. The report found higher levels of mercury in albacore tuna than previously thought, and the authors concluded that there is no reason to include this type of tuna in a child's diet, when they could have canned light tuna, instead.
- Children who are small (under 55 pounds) should eat canned light tuna no more than once a month. Children over 55 pounds can have canned light tuna twice a month. Federal guidelines allow [canned light tuna](#) twice a week for all children.

- Schools, parents, and caregivers should coordinate when children are fed canned tuna, so they don't receive more than two such meals a month.
- Schools and parents should consider serving other types of seafood, such as salmon or shrimp, that aren't typically high in mercury.

So why not simply cut canned tuna out of a child's diet altogether? Because there are nutritional benefits to eating this type of seafood: Tuna is a lean protein source, contains [omega-3 fatty acids critical for the brain and nervous system](#), and is fairly inexpensive for schools and families. Seafood is also an excellent source of the mineral selenium, which some evidence suggests helps "bind" mercury in the body, making toxicity less likely.

The bottom line is that we probably do need to be careful with over-exposing young children to mercury, but we don't need to throw the baby out with the bath water. The wisest move? It's likely choosing canned light tuna over albacore, and mixing it up with other low-mercury seafood, like salmon and shrimp.

**Hungry for more?** Write to [eatandrun@usnews.com](mailto:eatandrun@usnews.com) with your questions, concerns, and feedback.

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<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/blogs/eat-run/2012/09/28/should-tuna-be-banned-from-school-lunches>



**Environmental Health News**  
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## **School tuna contains excessive mercury, environmentalists' report says**

Canned albacore tuna purchased by U.S. schools contains more mercury than what government officials have reported, raising the risks for some tuna-loving kids, according to a new study from a coalition of advocacy groups. Children who eat two medium servings of albacore, or white, tuna per week could be exposed to as much as six times the dose that federal guidelines consider safe, according to the report prepared for the Mercury Policy Project. It is the first study to test the mercury content of tuna brands purchased by schools. The report recommends that all children avoid eating albacore tuna. In addition, it advises children under 55 pounds to limit "light" tuna to one meal no more than once a month, and twice a month for children over that weight. The recommendations are much more restrictive than any experts have previously

recommended.



USDA

Mercury, often found in canned tuna, is a neurotoxin that builds up in large fish such as albacore tuna.

By Brett Israel  
Staff Writer  
Environmental Health News

September 19, 2012

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The report recommends that all children avoid eating albacore tuna. In addition, it advises children under 55 pounds to limit “light” tuna to one meal once a month, and twice a month for children over that weight.

Since 2004, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Environmental Protection Agency have recommended that pregnant and nursing women, women who may become pregnant and young

children limit canned white tuna to one six-ounce serving per week. Light tuna – made from a species known as shipjack – contains less mercury so the government recommends no more than 12 ounces per week.

But the advocates say those recommendations are too lax because their tests show that "customers who choose canned albacore tuna may fairly frequently get mercury levels more than twice the FDA's average for the species," the report says.

**“Nobody can really say what the effects on children are, because nobody has really looked. It’s perfectly reasonable to assume that a child is vulnerable to methylmercury poisoning, although there’s no epidemiological evidence right now.” -Ned Groh, report co-author** Light tuna, on the other hand, was slightly lower in mercury than FDA tests have shown.

FDA officials and representatives of tuna companies were unavailable for comment on the findings.

Mercury is a neurotoxin that builds up in fish, particularly larger ones such as albacore tuna.

Because canned tuna is a cheap, nutritional food that is popular in schools, parents should rotate other fish into their children’s diet to reduce their risk of neurological effects, the report suggests.

“Most kids don’t eat that much tuna, so nothing really is needed to modify the behavior of a majority of kids,” said Ned Groh, co-author of the report and former senior scientist at the Consumers Union. “Kids who are probably above the ninetieth percentile in terms of how much tuna they eat, that’s where I’d focus my attention.”

Scientists not involved with the study generally agreed with the report’s advice.

“They are probably good, conservative recommendations,” said University of South Carolina assistant professor Jennifer Nyland, who studies mercury’s effects on autoimmune diseases.

A panel of scientists from the National Research Council concluded more than a decade ago that prenatal exposure to mercury reduces the mental abilities of children, including their motor skills, attention and IQs. The FDA and EPA fish consumption guidelines are based on 25 years of studies of effects in Faroe Islands children highly exposed to mercury in the womb.

There is little data, however, on the health risks for children, rather than their pregnant mothers, who eat tuna. Industry groups argue that kids have been eating tuna fish sandwiches for years with no apparent harm.

“Nobody can really say what the effects on children are, because nobody has really looked,” Groh said. “It’s perfectly reasonable to assume that a child is vulnerable to methylmercury poisoning, although there’s no epidemiological evidence right now.”

The groups’ recommendations for limiting kids’ consumption of light tuna are much more restrictive than any experts have recommended. Their goal was to keep kids’ mercury exposures

within 25 percent of the EPA's recommended "safe" dose, even though the EPA already has built a 10-fold margin of safety into that dose. Groth said that is a valid goal because of the substantial scientific uncertainties about the risks to children.

**"The main value of this study is that it points out that because tuna, especially white, or albacore, can be moderate-to-high in mercury – and because canned tuna is so popular in our diets – that mercury exposure from canned tuna is of concern."** *Roxanne Karimi, Stony Brook University* The levels of mercury in 11 samples of albacore canned tuna averaged 0.560 micrograms of mercury per gram of tuna. The average reported by FDA this year is 0.350 micrograms per gram. The sample size is small, but three out of the 11 cans had mercury levels more than twice the average values reported by the FDA.

The average mercury in 48 samples of "light" tuna was roughly one-third the level found in the white tuna.

The report adds to other research showing that albacore tuna has more mercury than FDA tests have revealed.

"The main value of this study is that it points out that because tuna, especially white, or albacore, can be moderate-to-high in mercury – and because canned tuna is so popular in our diets – that mercury exposure from canned tuna is of concern," said Roxanne Karimi, a marine scientist at Stony Brook University who was not involved with the study. Karimi's research also has shown that mercury levels in fish vary widely from what the FDA reports.

The new study examined the mercury concentrations in 35 large (66.5 oz) cans and 24 large (43 oz) foil pouches from brand lines and products sold specifically to schools. The tuna was from six brands of "light" tuna and two brands of albacore tuna, including Sunkist and Chicken of the Sea, which made up 60 percent of the light tuna studied.

Fifty of the 59 tuna samples were imported to the United States. The nine samples of U.S.-caught tuna had the lowest average mercury concentration. "Light" tuna from Ecuador had the highest.

In the study, tuna mercury levels were highly variable between samples, which means parents or schools can't easily judge its safety, Groth said. The report suggests that schools should avoid buying tuna from Ecuador and other Latin American countries, instead buying U.S. or Asian tuna.

Groth said the take-home message for parents isn't that their kids should stop eating fish. "Focus on kids who eat too much tuna and give them other kinds of nutritious seafood," he said. "Don't stop eating tuna. It's OK for most kids."

The report was co-sponsored by nine other advocacy groups, including Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

# Take tuna off school menus, group says

by Elizabeth Weise, USA TODAY

A coalition of consumer groups is recommending the U.S. Department of Agriculture get tuna out of school lunchrooms after tests of canned tuna sold to schools found highly variable levels of mercury, in some cases higher than federal guidelines.

Tuna industry groups countered that canned tuna is safe and wholesome. The real public health issue is that "we don't eat enough" seafood, says Gavin Gibbons of the National Fisheries Institute, a seafood industry group in McLean, Va.

The Mercury Policy Project of Montpelier, Vt., is a non-profit working to reduce mercury in the environment. It tested 59 samples of tuna in institution-size cans and foil pouches from 11 states. The levels of methylmercury were in general close to previous tests done by the Food and Drug Administration. However, levels of mercury varied widely, even from the same can or pouch. The average methylmercury content ranged from 0.02 to 0.64 parts per million in light tuna and between 0.19 and 1.27 parts per million in albacore tuna.

"On any given day in a given school, children eating the same meal could get mercury doses that vary by tenfold," just because of the variability of the chunk of meat in the packet," says Edward Groth, author of the report, released Wednesday. It was sponsored by several groups, including the Center for Science in the Public Interest and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Current federal dietary guidelines urge Americans to eat seafood twice a week because seafood is a healthy protein and contains omega-3 fatty acids, important for metabolism, but most people eat it once a week or less, says Gibbons.

"To suggest we're eating too much is almost comical," he says. Scaring children away from tuna "at a point in their life when they're developing their nutrition habits and their palates" is damaging.

Diane Pratt-Heavner of the School Nutrition Association in National Harbor, Md., says she doesn't believe tuna is a big issue because it's not popular on school lunch menus. She only sees it as an item in deli-style counters, mostly in high schools, where it's one choice among many.

Groth agrees that tuna isn't a huge part of school lunches, but wants to make sure kids aren't getting too much. And parents need to be aware of how much tuna their children eat, he says. Kids who eat a tuna sandwich a month aren't at risk but some children, "we don't know how many there are," love tuna and eat a lot of it, he says. Even four times a month could have "subtle adverse effects" on some children. "We're trying to put those kids on the map," he says.

The Environmental Protection Agency's maximum acceptable dose for methylmercury, a potent neurotoxin, is one-tenth of a microgram per kilogram of a person's body weight. Even tiny levels of methylmercury have been linked to learning disabilities and developmental delays in children, according to EPA scientists.

To ensure that the brains of fetuses and children aren't exposed to levels high enough to damage them, the EPA and FDA said in 2004 that women who are pregnant or might be pregnant can eat up to two meals, or 12 ounces, of fish and shellfish a week. Children should eat "smaller portions," the guidelines said.

Since the EPA adopted that standard, some studies indicate it may be too high. "Our research suggests that this limit should be decreased by 50%," says Philippe Grandjean, a professor of environmental studies at Harvard University who studies mercury in seafood. "If anything, [the Mercury Project] report underestimates the risks associated with regular tuna intake."

By the Mercury Project's measure, a 44-pound child who ate just two ounces of albacore tuna at levels the project found in some tuna would be getting almost half, 47%, of the standard. Based on the emerging evidence, the report recommends that children not eat albacore tuna, which can have more mercury, and that young children eat canned light tuna only once a month and older children only twice a month. They also suggest school lunch programs limit canned tuna servings to twice a month and phase it out, moving toward lower-mercury seafoods such as salmon and shrimp.

Fish become contaminated when mercury in industrial pollution enters waterways. Bacteria transform the mercury into methylmercury, a more biologically active and dangerous form of the element, according to the Food and Drug Administration. Fish eat the bacteria and the mercury accumulates in the largest and oldest fish, which is why long-lived and large species such as tuna have higher levels. Canned light tuna comes from skipjack species of tuna, which are smaller and often younger. They haven't been around long enough to accumulate as much methylmercury in their systems. Albacore is harvested older and therefore contains more.

# Report: School canned-tuna lunches expose kids to mercury

## Americans get 1/3 of mercury exposure from canned-tuna

UPDATED 10:23 AM EDT Sep 19, 2012

The Tuna Surprise report, released by Mercury Policy Project and Clean Water Action, examined the mercury levels of canned tuna sold to schools and assessed children's exposure from the canned meat.

Canned tuna is by far the largest source of methylmercury in the average American diet and accounts for nearly one-third of total exposure to the toxic mercury compound, the report said. MPP tested the mercury content of 59 samples, representing eight brands of tuna, sold to schools in 11 states around the country, including Massachusetts.

"Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk," said Michael Bender, MPP's director. "So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives."

The report advises schools and parents not to serve any albacore tuna to children and to limit consumption of light tuna to twice a month for most children and only once a month for children who weigh less than 55 pounds.

American children eat twice as much tuna as they do any other kind of fish, and one out of every six seafood meals in the United States is canned tuna, the report said.

A tuna sandwich is an easy-to-fix parental favorite, and canned tuna is served through the federally subsidized school lunch program, the report said.

According to Clean Water Action keeping mercury-containing products, such as electronics, out of the trash and transitioning to cleaner energy sources can reduce mercury pollution and help make tuna safer to eat.

Read more: <http://www.wcvb.com/health/Report-School-canned-tuna-lunches-expose-kids-to-mercury/-/9848730/16660268/-/cw0o0v/-/index.html#ixzz26vhylXVd>

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=canned-tuna-may-contain-excessive-mercury>

## Canned Tuna May Contain Excessive Mercury

The tunafish often served in school lunches may contain too much mercury, according to environmentalists' testing

By [Brett Israel](#) and [Environmental Health News](#)

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But the advocates say those recommendations are too lax because their tests show that “customers who choose canned albacore tuna may fairly frequently get mercury levels more than twice the FDA's average for the species,” the report says.

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There is little data, however, on the health risks for children, rather than their pregnant mothers, who eat tuna. Industry groups argue that kids have been eating tuna fish sandwiches for years with no apparent harm.

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The groups’ recommendations for limiting kids’ consumption of light tuna are much more restrictive than any experts have recommended. Their goal was to keep kids’ mercury exposures within 25 percent of the EPA’s recommended “safe” dose, even though the EPA already has built a 10-fold margin of safety into that dose. Groth said that is a valid goal given the scientific uncertainty about the risks to children.

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In the study, tuna mercury levels were highly variable between samples, which means parents or schools can’t easily judge its safety, Groth said. The report suggests that schools should avoid buying tuna from Ecuador and other Latin American countries, instead buying U.S. or Asian tuna.

Groth said the take-home message for parents isn’t that their kids should stop eating fish. “Focus on kids who eat too much tuna and give them other kinds of nutritious seafood,” he said. “Don’t stop eating tuna. It’s OK for most kids.”

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*This article originally ran at [Environmental Health News](#), a news source published by Environmental Health Sciences, a nonprofit media company.*

On CSPI Net:

# Popular Children's Lunch Contains Hidden Danger, Groups Warn

## *Report Presents Findings on Mercury in Tuna Sold to Schools*

**September 19, 2012**

Some children may be at greater risk from mercury in tuna than previously thought, finds a new study by the Mercury Policy Project (MPP). [Tuna Surprise](#) contains the first-ever test results of canned tuna sold to schools, and assesses children's mercury exposure from canned tuna. Independent studies, not available when government advisories were issued eight years ago, indicate that adverse effects to methylmercury occur at much lower levels of exposure than previously thought. The report, co-released by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Safe Minds, and several other public health, consumer and environmental groups, advises schools and parents not to serve any albacore tuna to kids and to limit consumption of light tuna to twice a month for most kids and only once a month for smaller children (under 55 pounds).

"Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk," said Michael Bender, MPP's director. "So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives."

"Fish, including tuna, is generally a nutritious part of a healthy diet," said Sarah Klein, staff attorney in the Food Safety program at CSPI. "But especially for our littlest, most vulnerable children, we have to make sure the risks from mercury in tuna don't outweigh tuna's benefits. We're urging parents and schools to limit children's tuna consumption and, when they do serve it, to choose lower-mercury options."

"As the report states, light tuna has one-third as much mercury as albacore does," added Eric Uram of Safe Minds. "But contrary to the current Federal fish consumption advisory, it is definitely not a low-mercury fish."

[Tuna Surprise](#) points out that canned tuna is by far the largest source of methylmercury in the US diet and accounts for nearly one-third of Americans' total exposure to this toxic mercury compound.

MPP tested the mercury content of fifty-nine samples, representing eight brands of tuna, sold to schools in 11 states around the country.

"As far as we know, no one has previously tested this market sector," said Bender. Testing showed that the tuna contains mercury levels similar to what other investigations have found in canned tuna sold in supermarkets. Albacore or "white" tuna had much higher mercury levels than did "light" tuna, and mercury levels in both types were highly variable.

Canned tuna is inexpensive and nutritious, a low-fat protein source, and a popular lunch food for kids. American kids eat twice as much tuna as they do any other kind of fish, and one out of every six US seafood meals is canned tuna. A tuna sandwich is an easy-to-fix parental favorite, and canned tuna is served through the federally subsidized school lunch program. And schools may be switching to leaner protein sources this fall as they implement the [new school lunch standards](#).

Ned Groth, Ph.D., an environmental health scientist with over 40 years of experience, analyzed a variety of scenarios in which children of different ages ate different amounts of tuna with different mercury levels, and examined the relative exposure and risk from each scenario. Exposures in those scenarios ranged from less than one-quarter of to more than 40 times the current federal definition

of safe exposure. "Kids who eat tuna frequently can easily get very high mercury doses," says Groth. "Some of the larger doses are clearly far too high to be acceptable."

"It's a shame that such a great source of inexpensive protein is contaminated with mercury," say Dr. Thomasson, Executive Director of Physicians for Social Responsibility. "To reduce risk, we need to both reduce children's exposure to tuna and reduce mercury pollution the majority of which is from coal-burning power plants."

While reducing mercury emissions will take years, parents and schools can manage risk now by being aware of children's tuna consumption and taking steps, where necessary, to keep exposure to mercury low.

[Tuna Surprise](#) offers these recommendations (among others):

- **Children should not eat albacore tuna.** Albacore or "white" tuna contains triple the mercury level of light tuna; nothing justifies tripling a child's mercury dose.
- **Children weighing more than 55 pounds should not eat more than two servings of light tuna per month.** This amount of tuna (six ounces) is more than the average child currently consumes; the mercury dose it contains is acceptably low in risk.
- **Children up to 55 pounds should consume no more than one tuna meal per month.** Because of their smaller body size, an added margin of caution is appropriate for younger children.
- **"Tuna-loving" kids should be the focus of risk-management efforts.** In particular:
  - No child should eat tuna every day. (Tuna Surprise presents cases of children who did that, and were diagnosed with clinical methylmercury poisoning.)
  - Parents and schools should offer children other seafood choices, such as shrimp and salmon, which are just as nutritious but contain far less mercury.
- **The U.S. Department of Agriculture's School Lunch Program should phase out commodity purchases of canned tuna,** and replace it with lower-mercury alternative seafood items and other extra-lean protein sources.
- **Parents should monitor their children's canned tuna consumption at school and ensure that the total consumed at home and at school does not exceed the recommendations for exposure.**

From:

[http://www.boston.com/lifestyle/green/greenblog/2012/09/some\\_students\\_being\\_served\\_too.html](http://www.boston.com/lifestyle/green/greenblog/2012/09/some_students_being_served_too.html)

# The Green Blog

Home. Business. Life.

[Too much mercury in some students' school lunches](#)

Posted by Beth Daley September 19, 2012 09:25 AM

Students may be taking in unsafe levels of mercury with their tuna fish sandwiches at the school lunch table, new research shows.

The report, called “Tuna Surprise” advises school officials and parents not to serve any albacore tuna to children and to limit consumption of light tuna to twice a month for most kids and only once a month for children under 55 pounds. Researchers, commissioned by the Vermont-based Mercury Policy Project which works to lower mercury levels in the environment, found triple the amount of mercury in albacore compared to light tuna. The study is believed to be the first of its kind to examine mercury in school lunches.

Mercury is a neurotoxin that can damage the developing brain of children and fetuses. Power plants and incinerators emit the metal into the air, and the pollutant can travel thousands of miles before falling and washing into waterways. Fish then accumulate the mercury over time and humans can be poisoned from eating too much fish. In Massachusetts and many neighboring states, pregnant woman and children are urged not to eat fish from any lake or pond because of the mercury danger.

“It’s unfortunate that this otherwise healthy food is contaminated with toxic mercury and that parents and schools need to keep it from appearing too frequently on the menu,” said Elizabeth Saunders, Massachusetts Legislative Director for Clean Water Action, which co-released the report. She said there was good news in the study because it can be easy to reduce exposure.



MPP tested the mercury content of fifty-nine samples, representing eight brands of tuna, sold to schools in 11 states around the country, including Massachusetts. Mercury levels were consistent with levels found in tuna sold in grocery and seafood stores, but were troubling because American school children eat twice as much tuna as they do any other kind of fish

– and it’s a staple in many school lunch programs.

Study sponsors were quick to point out that the research did not mean all children were at risk - but parents and schools needed to focus in on those children who "loved" tuna to limit their exposure.

“Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk,” said Michael Bender, MPP’s director. “So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives.”

Here are some recommendations from the report:

- Children weighing more than 55 pounds should not eat more than two servings of light tuna per month. This amount of tuna (six ounces) is more than the average child currently

consumes; the mercury dose it contains is acceptably low in risk.

- Children up to 55 pounds should consume no more than one tuna meal per month. Because of their smaller body size, an added margin of caution is appropriate for younger children.
- “Tuna-loving” kids should be the focus of risk-management efforts. In particular:
  - o No child should eat tuna every day.
  - o Parents and schools should offer children other seafood choices, such as shrimp and salmon, which are just as nutritious but contain far less mercury.
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- Parents should monitor their children’s canned tuna consumption at school and ensure that the total consumed at home and at school does not exceed the recommendations for exposure.

For more information:

<http://mercuryfactsandfish.org/>

<http://blueocean.org/documents/2012/07/boi-mercury-report.pdf>

(Photo courtesy of USDA.gov)

From CBS News web site, [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504763\\_162-57515929-10391704/tests-of-tuna-sold-for-school-lunches-reveal-variations-in-mercury-levels/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504763_162-57515929-10391704/tests-of-tuna-sold-for-school-lunches-reveal-variations-in-mercury-levels/)

September 19, 2012 12:17 PM

## Tests of tuna sold for school lunches reveal variations in mercury levels

(Credit: istockphoto)



(CBS News) Are kids' school lunches safe?

A new report from the advocacy group Mercury Policy Project finds tuna served as school lunches in some states may contain levels of mercury that the organization deems toxic.

Mercury is a naturally occurring neurotoxin in the environment that can be released into the air through industrial pollution. It builds up in water and streams

and turns into methylmercury, a compound which is then absorbed by fish as they feed.

The report, called "[Tuna Surprise](#)" is the first to test canned tuna sold to schools, according to its authors.

"Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk," Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project, said in a [statement](#). "So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives."

According to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA), nearly all fish and shellfish contain trace levels of mercury, and some can contain higher levels than others. Methylmercury has been tied to harmful effects on unborn babies' and young children's developing nervous systems, according to the EPA.

In 2004, the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#) recommended that pregnant women, nursing moms and young kids should avoid certain types of fish high in mercury including shark, swordfish and king mackerel. The agency also said commonly eaten canned albacore "white" tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna, and recommends eating only 6 ounces (or one meal) of white tuna per week.

The watchdog group the [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#) - one of the study's sponsors - claims that canned tuna is "by far the largest source of methylmercury in the U.S. diet" and accounts for one-third of American's exposure to this toxic compound of mercury. What's more, the group says studies since the government's recommendation have found adverse effects of methylmercury may occur at lower levels than previously through.

For the new study, researchers obtained 59 tuna samples (35 large cans, 24 foil pouches) from 11 states in the market sector that sells tuna to schools.

Overall, the average mercury level was 0.118 micrograms per gram of tuna, slightly lower than the FDA-reported average of 0.128 micrograms per gram. However, 11 samples of albacore tuna tested had an average of 0.560 parts per million (ppm) of methylmercury, much higher than the FDA-reported average of 0.350 ppm.

Mercury levels vary considerably within from sample to sample, with light tuna samples ranging from 0.020 to 0.640 ppm, and for white tuna, 0.190 to 1.270 ppm.

Nine of the samples were from the U.S. and had the lowest mercury level by country-of-origin. The other 50 samples were imports, with tuna from Ecuador having "by far the highest average level," with 0.254 ppm of methylmercury.

The report's authors recommend that children should avoid albacore tuna entirely given it contains roughly three times as much mercury, and said smaller children weighing less than 55 pounds should eat light tuna no more than once a month. Most children should eat light tuna only twice a month, the group said.

They warned kids should not be allowed to eat tuna every day and parents should identify kids who "love tuna" and eat it often to try and limit them to only two meals per month. The authors call on the USDA to phase out subsidies for tuna in the school lunch program.

"There is no sound reason why taxpayer dollars should be used to subsidize any part of this risk," the group wrote.

The full report from the [Mercury Policy Project](#) can be accessed here.

Gavin Gibbons of the industry group the National Fisheries Institute, disputed the study to [USA Today](#).

"To suggest we're eating too much is almost comical," he said. Scaring kids away from tuna "at a point in their life when they're developing their nutrition habits and their palates" is damaging.

From a website called Consumer Affairs,  
<http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/2012/09/report-finds-mercury-in-tuna-sold-to-schools.html>

# Report Finds Mercury in Tuna Sold to Schools

*Parents and schools advised to limit servings of tuna to children*

09/19/2012 | By [Truman Lewis](#)  | ConsumerAffairs | [Health](#)



Tuna is a tasty, high-protein, low-fat food and it can even be prepared in recipes that kids like. But a new report finds that children may be at more risk from mercury in tuna than had previously been thought.

The report, co-released by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), Physicians for Social Responsibility, Safe Minds, and several other groups, advises schools and parents not to serve any albacore tuna to kids and to limit consumption of light tuna to

twice a month for most kids and only once a month for smaller children (under 55 pounds).

The [study](#) by the Mercury Policy Project contains the first-ever test results of canned tuna sold to schools. It also notes that new studies have found adverse effects of tuna consumption at lower levels than expected.

From a Website called Education Week, [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2012/09/researchers\\_limit\\_tuna\\_at\\_school\\_h.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2012/09/researchers_limit_tuna_at_school_h.html)

## **Researchers: Limit Tuna Servings at School, Home**

By [Nirvi Shah](#) on September 19, 2012 12:55 PM

Children should eat light tuna no more than once or twice a month, depending on their size, and they should never eat albacore tuna, to reduce their exposure to mercury, a research and advocacy group said today.

These limits should encompass all of children's meals, at school and home, [a new report](#) from the Vermont-based Mercury Policy Project says.

The problem with too much mercury: impairment of cognitive thinking, memory, attention, language, and fine-motor and visual spatial skills. While most research has focused on these effects of mercury on developing fetuses, the [Mercury Policy Project](#) said mercury can have the same effects on children's still-developing brains.

"The question is not tuna or no tuna, it's how often," said Ned Groth, a consultant scientist with the group and the author of the report. "The risk is perfectly acceptable if [children's] intake is low."

Schools have been buying less tuna to serve in school meals—in the 2010-11 school year, schools in the [National School Lunch Program](#) bought 6 million pounds of tuna, down from 10 million pounds in 2008. But as schools work toward [new school meal requirements](#) that call for lower-calorie, more-healthy meals, tuna may become more appealing because it is a low-fat source of protein, said Sarah Klein, a staff attorney with the Food Safety Program at the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which operates the school lunch and breakfast programs, said that it no longer buys tuna for any of its nutrition programs because there isn't a domestic supplier of the product, although schools can buy tuna on their own.

In [a recent survey](#) of school food directors, the School Nutrition Association asked about the most popular lunch and breakfast choices in schools and tuna was not on the list, and sandwiches or wraps—where tuna would be most likely to appear—was the most popular lunch entrée in only 1.1 percent of responding districts. Pizza, chicken, beef, pasta, and Mexican dishes are the leading favorites, with pizza registering as the most popular item by a wide margin.

As part of its research, the Mercury Policy Project tested some of the tuna available in schools and found that mercury levels varied from brand to brand and within a single large can of tuna, which may contain a mix of fish from different places. That led to the recommendations that children who weigh 55 pounds or less should not eat light tuna more than once a month and larger children should eat it no more than twice a month, Groth said. Children should never eat tuna every day. And kids of all sizes should never eat albacore tuna, which can have triple the mercury of light tuna, Groth said.

He noted that as the organization searched for samples to test, some school districts could not participate because tuna isn't on their menus.

Mercury gets into the oceans from the burning of coal, volcanic eruptions, and erosion. It's converted by bacteria to methylmercury, and this substance accumulates in animals who eat the fish and animals who consume this bacteria. So tuna are among the larger creatures in which mercury collects. For children who like tuna, salmon, shrimp, and sardines can be offered as alternatives, Groth said.

The Food and Drug Administration is in the midst of reviewing its guidelines about acceptable mercury exposure, he said. The [current guidelines](#), created with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, date back to 2004.

CNN Web site, <http://thechart.blogs.cnn.com/2012/09/19/report-kids-should-only-eat-tuna-once-a-month/>

September 19th, 2012, 01:33 PM ET

## **Report: Kids should only eat tuna once a month**

Parents, take note: A new report from the [Mercury Policy Project](#) says kids should only eat light tuna once or twice a month to keep their mercury intake at a safe level.

Report author Dr. Edward Groth analyzed 59 tuna samples from around the country, including a few school districts. He recommends kids who weigh less than 55 pounds eat light tuna only once a month; kids more than 55 pounds can eat tuna twice a month.

Children should avoid eating white albacore tuna all together, the group says, as it was found to have triple the amount of mercury as light tuna. The brand of tuna doesn't seem to matter, as Groth found varying levels of mercury in each can he tested.

Mercury has been linked to cognitive decline in infants. There have been no epidemiological studies on the effects of mercury in children in the United States, according to Groth, but scientists suspect that the [chemical harms developing kids](#) the same way it's been shown to harm fetuses.

Although there are still a lot of uncertainties, "We think people need advice now," Groth said.

This is on the Gannett web site, and linked to from web pages of many local Gannett papers:

<http://www.pressconnects.com/article/20120919/APHEADS/309190025/Take-tuna-off-school-menus-group-says?odyssey=tab%7Ctopnews%7Ctext%7CFRONTPAGE>

## Take tuna off school menus, group says

<http://www.pressconnects.com/article/20120919/APHEADS/309190025/Take-tuna-off-school-menus-group-says?odyssey=tab%7Ctopnews%7Ctext%7CFRONTPAGE>

Written by

Elizabeth Weise

USA TODAY

- Filed Under
- [Nation-World](#)

A coalition of consumer groups is recommending the U.S. Department of Agriculture get tuna out of school lunchrooms after tests of canned tuna sold to schools found highly variable levels of mercury, in some cases higher than federal guidelines.

Tuna industry groups countered that canned tuna is safe and wholesome. The real public health issue is that "we don't eat enough" seafood, says Gavin Gibbons of the [National Fisheries Institute](#), a seafood industry group in McLean, Va.

The Mercury Policy Project of Montpelier, Vt., is a non-profit working to reduce mercury in the environment. It tested 59 [samples of tuna in institution-size cans](#) and foil pouches from 11 states. The levels of methylmercury were in general close to previous tests done by the Food and Drug Administration. However, levels of mercury varied widely, even from the same can or pouch. The average methylmercury content ranged from 0.02 to 0.64 parts per million in light tuna and between 0.19 and 1.27 parts per million in albacore tuna.

“On any given day in a given school, children eating the same meal could get mercury doses that vary by tenfold, just because of the variability of the chunk of meat in the packet,” says Edward Groth, author of the report, released Wednesday. It was sponsored by several groups, including the Center for Science in the Public Interest and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Current federal dietary guidelines urge Americans to eat seafood twice a week because seafood is a healthy protein and contains omega-3 fatty acids, important for metabolism, but most people eat it once a week or less, says Gibbons.

“To suggest we’re eating too much is almost comical,” he says. Scaring children away from tuna “at a point in their life when they’re developing their nutrition habits and their palates” is damaging.

Diane Pratt-Heavner of the School Nutrition Association in National Harbor, Md., says she doesn’t believe tuna is a big issue because it’s not popular on school lunch menus. She only sees it as an item in deli-style counters, mostly in high schools, where it’s one choice among many.

(Page 2 of 2)

Groth agrees that tuna isn’t a huge part of school lunches, but wants to make sure kids aren’t getting too much. And parents need to be aware of how much tuna their children eat, he says. Kids who eat a tuna sandwich a month aren’t at risk but some children, “we don’t know how many there are,” love tuna and eat a lot of it, he says. Even four times a month could have “subtle adverse effects” on some children. “We’re trying to put those kids on the map,” he says. The Environmental Protection Agency’s maximum acceptable dose for methylmercury, a potent neurotoxin, is one-tenth of a microgram per kilogram of a person’s body weight. Even tiny levels of methylmercury have been linked to learning disabilities and developmental delays in children, according to EPA scientists.

To ensure that the brains of fetuses and children aren’t exposed to levels high enough to damage them, the EPA and FDA said in 2004 that women who are pregnant or might be pregnant can eat up to two meals, or 12 ounces, of fish and shellfish a week. Children should eat “smaller portions,” the guidelines said.

Since the EPA adopted that standard, some studies indicate it may be too high. “Our research suggests that this limit should be decreased by 50 percent,” says Philippe Grandjean, a professor of environmental studies at Harvard University who studies mercury in seafood. “If anything, (the Mercury Project) report underestimates the risks associated with regular tuna intake.”

By the Mercury Project’s measure, a 44-pound child who ate just two ounces of albacore tuna at levels the project found in some tuna would be getting almost half, 47 percent, of the standard. Based on the emerging evidence, the report recommends that children not eat albacore tuna, which can have more mercury, and that young children eat canned light tuna only once a month and older children only twice a month. They also suggest school lunch programs limit canned tuna servings to twice a month and phase it out, moving toward lower-mercury seafoods such as salmon and shrimp.

Fish become contaminated when mercury in industrial pollution enters waterways. Bacteria transform the mercury into methylmercury, a more biologically active and dangerous form of the element, according to the Food and Drug Administration. Fish eat the bacteria and the mercury accumulates in the largest and oldest fish, which is why long-lived and large species such as tuna have higher levels.

Canned light tuna comes from skipjack species of tuna, which are smaller and often younger. They haven’t been around long enough to accumulate as much methylmercury in their systems. Albacore is harvested older and therefore contains more.

# BLACKBOARD: Are some kids getting too much mercury from tuna?

From the North County Times, San Diego/Riverside, CA, web site,  
[http://www.nctimes.com/blogsnew/news/youth/blackboard-are-some-kids-getting-too-much-mercury-from-tuna/article\\_db322d01-8898-5bfc-915b-1658ca55d927.html](http://www.nctimes.com/blogsnew/news/youth/blackboard-are-some-kids-getting-too-much-mercury-from-tuna/article_db322d01-8898-5bfc-915b-1658ca55d927.html)

51 minutes ago • [By STACY BRANDT sbrandt@nctimes.com](mailto:sbrandt@nctimes.com)

Are your kids eating too much tuna?

A new study released today suggests that some Tuna-loving children may be getting more mercury than their little bodies can handle.

Researchers from the Mercury Policy Project recommend that children avoid eating albacore tuna, which has more mercury than light tuna.

They also recommend that children weighing less than 55 pounds not eat tuna more than once a month. Parents of most children should limit their consumption to twice a month, the researchers suggest.

Maybe it's time to try to get your kids more excited about eating salmon or shrimp, which have less mercury than tuna.

Read a summary of the findings [here](#) or the full report [here](#)

From: Take Part, a blog, <http://www.takepart.com/article/2012/09/19/tuna-consumption-and-children>

[Food](#)

## Is Tuna Surprise Damaging Your Child's Brain?

The Mercury Policy Project says even small amounts of tuna—especially albacore—could be doing harm to kids.

By [Clare Leschin-Hoar](#)

September 19, 2012

Sorry, Charlie. Children should not eat albacore [tuna](#), says environmental group Mercury Policy Project in what's sure to be a contested report issued today.

You heard us. No tuna salad [sandwiches](#), no tuna casserole, and forget about that gooey tuna melt, unless you're making it with light tuna, and even then, don't serve it up to your munchkin more than once a month.

Why? Because the group says mercury levels in albacore tuna, still well below [FDA guidelines](#), are high enough to impact the brain of a young child.

“What we are concerned about in [“Tuna Surprise”](#) is the much subtler risk of barely noticeable but significant effects on the brain development, learning ability, etc. that may be occurring in kids with blood mercury levels great than 5 ug/L,” Edward Groth, the study's author tells TakePart.

### **MORE: [6 Expert Fish Tips from Seafood Stars](#)**

The group tested 59 samples of canned tuna sold to schools and used in USDA-subsidized school lunch programs and found average mercury levels that ranged from 0.118 parts per million (ppm), to 0.560 ppm. Since 2004, FDA guidelines for methylmercury found in tuna were set at no more than 1 ppm with a safety margin of x10. The Vermont-based Mercury Policy Project's own testing for mercury in tuna mostly [mirrors that done by the FDA itself](#)—all of which, including Mercury Policy Project's, results fall far below the 1 ppm limit.

To be clear, the study is not talking about mercury poisoning. As Groth says, they're raising the issue of subtle effects on brain development, but the report may leave parents scratching their heads on what they should do, particularly since tuna is an affordable, important source of protein for many families, and one loaded with essential fatty acids. Indeed, the report says there is no “bright line between safe and unsafe exposures,” and that “the majority of U.S. children currently fall well within this [safe] consumption level.”

So why the fire alarm? Groth says the current FDA definition of safety is out of date, since more recent studies show adverse effects can occur at levels previously thought to be safe. Industry experts have been [pressuring the FDA](#) to update their mercury consumption guidelines for several years, yet an FDA draft report on the [risk and benefit assessment of fish consumption](#) has languished in the agency since 2009.

Gavin Gibbons, spokesman for the National Fisheries Institute, says the Mercury Policy Project report is doing a disservice to public health.

“Even the USDA dietary guidelines say Americans don’t eat enough seafood,” he says. “So you’re targeting a population that doesn’t eat enough seafood to begin with, and you’re using what is essentially a fake food safety scare to perpetuate a myth.”

[As we reported earlier this spring](#), if we’re looking at the health benefits of seafood, what we know is that Americans aren’t eating enough fish, and the Mercury Policy Project report says most Americans eat only about 100 grams of tuna—less than four ounces a month.

## **TAKE ACTION!** Craving Sushi? Use This App to Find Sustainable Seafood

The worry, they say, applies to children under 55 pounds who eat tuna more than once a week, and more so for children who eat tuna every day—a very tiny fraction of the population.

So should the study send you to your child’s school cafeteria demanding that tuna be thrown out of the school lunch program? Not necessarily. Tim Fitzgerald, the scientist who developed seafood contaminant guidelines for the [Environmental Defense Fund](#), says the key here is not to focus on albacore and mercury, but to encourage children to change up the kind of seafood they’re consuming.

“There needs to be a variety of low-mercury choices available to kids at school, like salmon, sardines and shrimp. If this report helps schools expand the variety of seafood they offer, then that’s a good thing,” he tells TakePart.

# Kids warned not to consume too much tuna

September 25, 2012|By Meredith Cohn

Kids may be getting too much mercury from their school lunches, specifically their [tuna](#) [sandwiches](#), according to a [new study](#) from consumer, [health](#) and environmental groups.

The study found that the adverse effects from popular school [lunch](#) staple, canned tuna, occurs at lower levels than previously thought and kids should not eat a whole lot of the albacore kind. Parents should stick with light tuna only twice a month and once a month for kids under 55 pounds, which has a third of the mercury, according to the groups, including the Center for Science in the Public Interest and Physicians for Social Responsibility, Safe Minds.

Loss Program Medifast, Recommended by 20k Drs. Lose 2-5 lbs per Week. Start Today.  
.com

Cholesterol These (3) Foods Will Shock You! Reduce Your Cholesterol Now. [knowwhatsbest.com](http://knowwhatsbest.com)

The groups said canned tuna is by far the largest source of methylmercury in the American diet and accounts for almost a third of people's total exposure. It largely comes from pollution from coal-burning power plants, the groups said. Still, they said they don't want kids to stop eating the fish, just the kind the amount of tuna. [Salmon](#) and shrimp are even better alternatives, they said.

"Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk," Michael Bender, director of the study called the [Mercury Policy Project](#), said in a statement. "So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury [seafood](#) or other nutritious alternatives."

For the study, the groups tested 59 samples, and eight brands of tuna, sold to schools in 11 states. They found the mercury levels were about the same as grocery tuna, with albacore having higher amounts of the toxic compound but both types being variable.

[http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-09-25/health/bal-poh-kids-warned-off-tuna\\_1\\_light-tuna-canned-tuna-mercury-policy-project](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-09-25/health/bal-poh-kids-warned-off-tuna_1_light-tuna-canned-tuna-mercury-policy-project)

## Why do we eat so much tuna?

- Article by: BRIAN PALMER , Slate
- Updated: September 25, 2012 - 11:24 AM

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Children weighing less than 55 pounds should eat tuna no more than once per month, according to a new report, because of concerns over mercury. But why do Americans eat so much tuna in the first place?

Children weighing less than 55 pounds should eat tuna no more than once per month, according to a report released last week, because of concerns over mercury. The controversial recommendation is stricter than that proposed by the FDA, and some experts say we should eat even more tuna, although it's already a lunchbox staple. Why did Americans fall for tuna?

Because it's cheap and bland. Most of the tuna consumed in 19th-century America was imported in cans from France and served to European guests at upscale East Coast restaurants. Mainstream Americans considered the fish too gamey, until a cannery in San Pedro Bay, Calif., figured out that the steamed white meat of albacore tuna has very little flavor if you drain the fish's own oil and can the meat with olive or cottonseed oil instead.

The company began marketing the product as a chicken alternative in 1907. It distributed thousands of free recipe booklets, which contained mostly classic chicken or canned salmon recipes with tuna as a substitute. Americans found that tuna's flavor was hardly noticeable in the right sauce, and sales began to rise.

The tuna revolution really took off, however, during World War I. European countries, and eventually the American government, bought the inexpensive canned fish to feed the troops. (Uncle Sam was so desperate for protein during the Great War that the government even tried to push whale as a beef substitute.) Returning soldiers continued eating tuna, which displaced salmon as America's fish of choice by the 1940s, and fishing boats had to venture further and further from shore to satisfy demand.

Canned tuna also owes its early success to El Nio. The California Fish Company, which popularized canned tuna in America, originally specialized in sardines. A change in the weather in 1903, however, pushed the tiny fish out of San Pedro Bay, forcing the company to experiment with substitutes like halibut and rock cod, eventually settling on albacore.

The novel product faced a serious marketing challenge. The only Americans who had ever heard of albacore were West Coast sport fishermen. The California Fish Company decided to label albacore as tuna, even though scientists of the day considered the two fish taxonomically distinct. While scientifically questionable at the time, the gambit worked, and Americans came to think of albacore, and not the better established bluefin and yellowfin, as the definitive tuna fish. The company was vindicated decades later, when scientists reclassified albacore as a tuna.

That wasn't the last taxonomic controversy in the commercial tuna industry. When albacore became scarce near U.S. coastlines in the mid-20th century from overfishing, canneries sought to sell the skipjack as a substitute. Skipjack belongs to the same taxonomic tribe (Thunnini) as albacore, but not to the same genus (Thunnus). The government ultimately decided to let the industry market skipjack as "light tuna," arguing that scientific and commercial names don't always have to agree.

Americans still eat twice as much tuna as salmon, their second-favorite fish. Tuna's share of the fish market has declined steadily over the past 25 years, however, and salmon could reclaim the title of America's favorite fish in the next decade or two. Some industry insiders blame dolphins for tuna's loss of market share. To earn the "dolphin-safe" label, fishermen have focused on skipjack, which don't typically associate with dolphin pods. The change may have had commercial costs, though: Many people prefer the taste of albacore to skipjack, and the difference in taste could be driving customers away.

<http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/health/171167661.html?refer=y>

CHILDREN, FDA, KIDS, MERCURY, TUNA

## WARNING SOUNDED AGAIN OVER TUNA FOR KIDS

By Megan Taros

1:49 PM  
SEPTEMBER 25, 2012

SOURCE [CBS-SF](#)

Charlie the Tuna — the awkwardly loveable and slightly creepy animated fish from back in the day — and his kin are having their reputation sunk again.

A **new report** from the Mercury Policy Project once again sounds the alarm over high mercury levels in tuna, particularly for kids who consume large amounts.

Albacore tuna is a big “no” when it comes to kids’ diets nowadays, the report says. And light tuna should be limited to one helping once a month for kids 55 pounds and below.

Big kids get to splurge a bit and have two.

Researchers tested 59 types of tuna from 11 different states. The results were not so savory and all over the map. Mercury varied from sample to sample. Even samples from the same container weren’t on par with each other.

What’s more unfortunate is that all samples came from places that directly supply the fish to children, such as schools and companies that stock school cafeterias with food.

The only somewhat safe bet was light tuna, which consistently showed lower levels of mercury than standard albacore.

The FDA is **sticking to its guns** despite the findings, touting what it’s been saying for years:

*“FDA and EPA recommend that women of childbearing age and children consume no more than 12 ounces a week of canned light tuna and only 6 ounces per week of canned albacore tuna, which is higher in mercury.”*

This report has ruffled the tuna council’s scales, as it pretty much ignored nutritious components of tuna. Selenium, omega-3 fatty acids, and lean proteins all have health benefits, according to Jennifer McGuire, dietitian with the **Tuna Council** of the National Fisheries Institute.

Report co-author Edward Groth said that while studies in the past have eschewed tuna for possible links to delayed mental development in children, the evidence is still not quite clear.

That’s also not to say that parents should withhold all tuna sandwiches and their mushy goodness from the kiddies. Groth said that it’s not about the tuna, it’s all in the amount.

So while consumers can breathe easy buying a few cans every month or so, tuna should not be as commonplace as it used to be on the family table by way of tuna melts and casseroles.

Sorry, Charlie.

More at SFBay: <http://sfbay.ca/2012/09/25/warning-sounded-again-over-tuna-for-kids/#ixzz28FmmvNJQ>

## Reading, 'Riting and Methylmercury

A new report raises concerns about mercury in the tuna served in schools.

[Comments \(0\)](#)

Thursday, September 27, 2012

By Maureen Turner

Kids heading back to school this month are finding healthier options in the lunchroom, thanks to new federal rules that require more fruits and vegetables, less sodium and fat and fewer calories in public-school lunches.

But a report released last week points to one area of potential risk that hasn't received much attention: the presence of mercury in tuna fish served in school lunches.

When mercury is released into the environment, it eventually makes its way into the water supply, and then into fishes' diets. The toxin accumulates at especially high levels in the bodies of larger and longer-lived predatory fish, including shark, swordfish and that lunchtime staple, tuna. When humans eat fish with high mercury levels, it can adversely affect brain development as well as the immune and nervous systems. Children are at particularly high risk.

The report—called, aptly, "Tuna Surprise"—was released by the Vermont-based Mercury Policy Project in conjunction with several other environmental and public health nonprofits, including the Vermont Public Interest Research Group and Mass. Clean Water Action. It looked at 59 samples of tuna sold to schools in 11 states, including Massachusetts. (The group declined to identify specific school districts, citing liability concerns.)

The results were mixed; in some cases, the samples tested actually had lower methylmercury levels than the levels found by other researchers in tuna sold in supermarkets. In other cases, the levels were significantly higher—specifically, in albacore tuna, which generally has higher levels than light tuna.

According to the report, new research indicates that mercury poses risks at lower levels than previously believed. And the risks, it adds, vary depending on several factors, including a child's weight, the kind of tuna and the serving size. "There is no 'bright line' between 'safe' and 'unsafe' exposures, and risk is generally proportional to dose," the researchers wrote.

To reduce children's risk, the report recommends that children eat no albacore tuna, which was found to have triple the mercury content of light tuna. It also recommends limiting exposure to light tuna, suggesting that smaller children (those weighing less than 55 pounds) eat it no more than once a month and bigger children no more than twice a month. Children who tend to consume a lot of tuna should have their blood tested for mercury.

"Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk," Michael Bender, the Mercury Policy Project director, said in a release. "So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives."

The report also calls on the federal government to stop subsidizing tuna in school lunch programs and instead phase in seafood with lower levels of mercury, such as salmon and shrimp. "Canned tuna is overwhelmingly the largest source of U.S. children's methylmercury exposure, and some children's overall mercury dose is clearly high enough to raise substantial risk concerns," the study says. "There is no sound reason why taxpayer dollars should be used to subsidize any part of this risk."

In addition, the groups behind the report support efforts to stop mercury from being released into the environment—and, eventually, finding its way into the fish we eat—in the first place. That includes, in Massachusetts, campaigns to reduce mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants and incinerators and to require recycling programs for old thermostats that contain mercury.

"It's unfortunate that this otherwise healthy food is contaminated with toxic mercury and that parents and schools need to keep it from appearing too frequently on the menu," Elizabeth Saunders, legislative director for Mass. Clean Water Action, said in an announcement of the report. "The good news is that there is a solution to this problem, if only our state's leaders can find the political will. Keeping mercury-containing products out of the trash and transitioning to cleaner energy sources will get us closer to putting a stop to mercury pollution and making tuna fish safe to eat again.

<http://www.valleyadvocate.com/article.cfm?aid=15648>

## Something Fishy About Mercury

*by Elizabeth Magill on September 26, 2012*

Two new studies confirm the health benefits of eating fish, but urge consumers to avoid fish containing high levels of methyl mercury.

### **Mercury in Tuna**

Another recent study focused on children. The [Mercury Policy Project \(MPP\)](#) warned that children should never eat albacore tuna because it could contain high levels of mercury.

The MPP report, called [Tuna Surprise: Mercury in School Lunches](#), says children who weigh under 55 pounds shouldn't consume canned light tuna more than once a month. And children weighing over 55 pounds should limit their tuna consumption to twice a month.

"We unfortunately have to bring consumers a warning about tuna. Despite its popularity, it should be a rare meal for children," said MPP member Sarah Klein.

"Fish, including tuna, is generally a nutritious part of a healthy diet," said Klein. "But especially for our littlest, most vulnerable children, we have to make sure the risks from mercury in tuna don't outweigh tuna's benefits. We're urging parents and schools to limit children's tuna consumption and, when they do serve it, to choose lower-mercury options."

MPP researchers analyzed 59 cans of tuna and found that mercury levels varied considerably from can to can – and sometimes within the can itself. Light tuna was found to have about one-third as much mercury as albacore.

Nearly a third of Americans' total exposure to mercury comes from canned tuna.

“Most children are consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk,” said Michael Bender, MPP’s director. “So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives.”

## **Mercury Poisoning**

Also referred to as mercurialism or hydrargyria, mercury poisoning is a medical condition caused by an overexposure to mercury or its compounds. Mercury is a heavy metal found in soil, rocks, water, and even air. Rainfall washes mercury from land into the ocean, causing some fish and shellfish to develop a buildup of methylmercury. How much mercury a fish or shellfish has is dependent upon its age and what they eat. The higher up in the food chain, the more likely a fish is to have mercury accumulation.

The symptoms of mercury poisoning include:

- A tingling sensation in the fingers and toes, known as peripheral neuropathy
- Loss of co-ordination
- Decrease peripheral vision
- Weak muscles
- Speech and hearing impairment
- Rashes, and red lips, nose and cheeks (particularly in children)
- Loss of teeth and nails (particularly in children)
- Cognitive and central nervous system impairments (in children whose mothers were exposed to high mercury levels when pregnant).

Despite the MPP findings, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is holding to its recommendation of a maximum of 6 ounces of albacore and 12 ounces of canned light tuna per week.

<http://americannewsreport.com/something-fishy-about-mercury-8815949>

[< Back to front page](#) Text size – +

# **Too much mercury in some students' school lunches**

[Print](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#) Posted by Beth Daley September 19, 2012 09:25 AM

Students may be taking in unsafe levels of mercury with their tuna fish sandwiches at the school lunch table, new research shows.

The report, called “Tuna Surprise” advises school officials and parents not to serve any albacore tuna to children and to limit consumption of light tuna to twice a month for most kids and only once a month for children under 55 pounds. Researchers, commissioned by the Vermont-based Mercury Policy Project which works to lower mercury levels in the environment, found triple the amount of mercury in albacore compared to light tuna. The study is believed to be the first of its kind to examine mercury in school lunches.

Mercury is a neurotoxin that can damage the developing brain of children and fetuses. Power plants and incinerators emit the metal into the air, and the pollutant can travel thousands of miles before falling and washing into waterways. Fish then accumulate the mercury over time and humans can be poisoned from eating too much fish. In Massachusetts and many neighboring states, pregnant woman and children are urged not to eat fish from any lake or pond because of the mercury danger.

“It’s unfortunate that this otherwise healthy food is contaminated with toxic mercury and that parents and schools need to keep it from appearing too frequently on the menu,” said Elizabeth Saunders, Massachusetts Legislative Director for Clean Water Action, which co-released the report. She said there was good news in the study because it can be easy to reduce exposure.

MPP tested the mercury content of fifty-nine samples, representing eight brands of tuna, sold to schools in 11 states around the country, including Massachusetts. Mercury levels were consistent with levels found in tuna sold in grocery and seafood stores, but were troubling because American school children eat twice as much tuna as they do any other kind of fish – and it’s a staple in many school lunch programs.

Study sponsors were quick to point out that the research did not mean all children were at risk - but parents and schools needed to focus in on those children who "loved" tuna to limit their exposure.

“Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk,” said Michael Bender, MPP’s director. “So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives.”

Here are some recommendations from the report:

- Children weighing more than 55 pounds should not eat more than two servings of light tuna per month. This amount of tuna (six ounces) is more than the average child currently consumes; the mercury dose it contains is acceptably low in risk.
- Children up to 55 pounds should consume no more than one tuna meal per month. Because of their smaller body size, an added margin of caution is appropriate for younger children.
- “Tuna-loving” kids should be the focus of risk-management efforts. In particular:
  - o No child should eat tuna every day.
  - o Parents and schools should offer children other seafood choices, such as shrimp and salmon, which are just as nutritious but contain far less mercury.

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's School Lunch Program should phase out commodity purchases of canned tuna, and replace it with lower-mercury alternative seafood items and other extra-lean protein sources.
- Parents should monitor their children's canned tuna consumption at school and ensure that the total consumed at home and at school does not exceed the recommendations for exposure.

For more information:

<http://mercuryfactsandfish.org/>

<http://blueocean.org/documents/2012/07/boi-mercury-report.pdf>

(Photo courtesy of USDA.gov)

[http://www.boston.com/lifestyle/green/greenblog/2012/09/some\\_students\\_being\\_served\\_too.html](http://www.boston.com/lifestyle/green/greenblog/2012/09/some_students_being_served_too.html)

## School Lunch Without Tuna: Mercury Policy Project Pushes Department Of Agriculture To Scrap Tuna From Schools

Posted: 09/21/2012 8:53 am EDT Updated: 09/21/2012 8:53 am EDT

The Mercury Policy Project of Montpelier, Vt., is pushing the U.S. Department of Agriculture to [scrap tuna from school lunch menus](#) after a test of 59 canned tuna samples sold to schools in 11 states revealed highly variable levels of mercury -- some of which exceeded federal guidelines, *USA Today* reports.

According to the study released Wednesday, the average methylmercury content ranged from 0.02 to 0.64 parts per million in light tuna, and between 0.19 and 1.27 parts per million in albacore tuna.

Researchers claim [children should never eat albacore tuna](#), as the risk of mercury exposure far outweighs any potential nutritional benefits, according to WXYZ.

The Environmental Protection Agency's maximum acceptable dose for methylmercury is one-tenth of a microgram per kilogram of an individual's body weight. According to *USA Today*, EPA scientists say even the smallest levels of methylmercury have been [tied to learning disabilities and developmental delays in children](#).

In 2004, the EPA and FDA recommended women who are pregnant or might be pregnant eat only up to two meals, or 12 ounces, of fish and shellfish a week to ensure that a fetus's brain is not exposed to damaging levels of mercury. The guidelines also stipulated children should eat "smaller portions." But since then, some studies have suggested even that [limit might be too high](#), *USA Today* reports.

Gavin Gibbons of the National Fisheries Institute, a seafood industry group in McLean, Va., countered that current federal dietary guidelines [recommend Americans eat seafood twice a week](#), since it is a healthy protein and contains omega-3 fatty acids that benefit metabolism as well as brain function and development. But most Americans only indulge in seafood about once a week, or not at all, according to Gibbons.

"To suggest we're eating too much is almost comical," he told the paper, adding that scaring children away from tuna "at a point in their life when they're developing their nutrition habits and their palates" is detrimental.

[Scientists like Michael Crawford](#) have also provided years of evidence that fatty acids available in fish are critical to a child's cognitive functions. His work, and that of others, have shown that children lacking these essential fatty acids will negatively affect children's behavior and increase risk of mental health issues.

The call to phase out tuna from school lunches comes as controversy continues to reign over the new [USDA school lunch requirements](#) that — in addition to [offering less sodium and more whole grains, fruits and vegetables](#) — impose age-aligned calorie maximums on meals. Reps. Steve King (R-Iowa) and Tim Huelskamp (R-Kansas) have recently [introduced legislation that would repeal the calorie limits](#).

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/20/consumer-group-pushes-us- n\\_1901780.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/20/consumer-group-pushes-us- n_1901780.html)

## Tuna too toxic for school lunches?

Published September 20, 2012

FoxNews.com

Is tuna too toxic for kids? Numerous consumer groups have joined together to recommend that the U.S. Department of Agriculture remove tuna from school menus, USA Today reported.

The proposal was prompted by recent tests, which revealed the canned tuna sold to schools contains variably high levels of mercury – sometimes surpassing the federal limit.

Researchers from the Mercury Policy Project of Montpelier – a non-profit based in Vermont, which is dedicated to eliminating mercury exposure and use – examined 59 samples of tuna in both cans and foil pouches from 11 states. While methylmercury levels were fairly close to levels found by the FDA, the levels also varied greatly. Average methylmercury levels ranged from 0.02 to 0.64 parts per million in light tuna and 0.19 to 1.27 parts per million in albacore tuna, according to the newspaper.

According to 2004 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommendations, young children should consume two meals a week of a variety of fish, in order to receive the health benefits of seafood while minimizing their exposure to mercury.

Seafood is often touted for its omega-3 fatty acids, considered essential for metabolism and reducing inflammation in the body.

However, consumer groups are saying the health benefits are overshadowed by the potential risks posed by mercury consumption. Current EPA guidelines recommend that for every kilogram of body weight, a person should consume no more than .1 microgram of mercury.

According to the EPA's website, too much mercury exposure in developing brains can cause severe learning disabilities and other birth defects.

[Click for the EPA and FDA fish and shellfish recommendations](#) ⇨

The Mercury Police Project argued the current EPA guidelines are still too high, saying that a 44-pound child who ate only two ounces of albacore tuna would be receive 47 percent of the recommend amount of mercury, USA Today said. The non-profit proposed children should stop eating albacore tuna altogether, and young children should only eat light tuna once a month.

Representatives from the tuna industry disagreed, maintaining that canned tuna is perfectly safe to eat. A speaker for the National Fisheries Institute in McLean, Va., said the real health problem is that people do not eat enough seafood.

Read more: <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2012/09/20/tuna-too-toxic-for-school-lunches/#ixzz28FoM2WIP>

## **New study shows high mercury levels in tuna; schools may pull tuna from menu**

Wednesday, a new study about the **mercury levels in canned [tuna](#)** was released and some of the results exceeded federal guidelines. Thursday, the report results caused some schools around the country to look at taking tuna off the school lunch menu after researchers stated that children should never eat albacore tuna.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture tested canned tuna from 59 samples in 11 states and some showed extremely high levels of mercury, according to *USA Today* reports. Because children weigh less and the mercury levels are so high...the offset can be devastating for children.

"Most children are consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk," said Michael Bender, [Mercury Policy Project's](#) (MPP) director. "So parents and schools should focus on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them other nutritious alternatives."

Researchers stated that children should never eat albacore tuna because the high level of mercury overshadows nutritional benefits. The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) also warned

that mercury poisoning has been tied to learning disabilities and developmental issues in children.

Pregnant women were warned in 2004 not to eat large quantities of tuna, but this new study reveals that even small quantities may be too much.

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Sources: The Huffington Post, USA Today and MPP

<http://www.examiner.com/article/new-study-shows-high-mercury-levels-tuna-schools-pull-tuna-from-menu>

## Tuna-Loving Kids at Risk of Mercury Poisoning

Posted by [News Editor](#) in [Food](#), [Latest News](#), [RSS](#) on September 20, 2012 5:09 pm / [no comments](#)

**MONTPELIER, Vermont**, September 20, 2012 (ENS) – Children who love to eat tuna fish may be at greater risk of mercury poisoning than anyone has realized, finds the first study on mercury in school lunches published Wednesday by the Mercury Policy Project.

Analysis of the research results shows that frequent tuna eaters can be exposed to more than 40 times the current federal definition of safe mercury exposure, which report co-author Dr. Ned Groth calls “way out of date and not protective enough.”

The human nervous system is very sensitive to all forms of mercury. Research has shown that children poisoned by mercury may develop problems of the nervous system with learning and cognitive impairment, and suffer disorders of the digestive system and kidney damage, according to the federal Agency for Toxic Substances.

Dr. Groth warns that while individual children vary widely in how mercury affects them, frequent tuna consumers can experience “subtle effects on cognitive ability and learning when exposed to this poisonous element.”

The [report](#), “Tuna Surprise,” contains the first test results for mercury in tuna sold to schools and assesses children’s mercury exposure from canned tuna.



Tuna fish is prepared for a school lunch in Arlington, Virginia. (Photo courtesy [U.S. Dept. of Agriculture](#))

Mercury Policy Project researchers tested the mercury content of 59 samples, representing eight brands of tuna, sold to schools in 11 states.

An inexpensive and nutritious low-fat protein source, canned tuna is served through the federally subsidized school lunch program. And schools may be switching to leaner protein sources this fall as they implement the new school lunch standards.

Independent studies, not available when government advisories were issued eight years ago, indicate that adverse effects of methylmercury occur at much lower levels of exposure than previously thought.

Canned tuna is by far the largest source of methylmercury in the U.S. diet and accounts for nearly one-third of Americans' total exposure to this toxic mercury compound.

"As far as we know, no one has previously tested this market sector," said Michael Bender, MPP's director.

Testing of tuna sold to schools showed that the tuna contains mercury levels similar to what other investigations have found in canned tuna sold in supermarkets. Albacore or "white" tuna had much higher mercury levels than did "light" tuna, and mercury levels in both types were highly variable.

The report advises schools and parents not to serve any albacore tuna to kids and to limit consumption of light tuna to twice a month for most kids and only once a month for smaller children, under 55 pounds.

"Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk," said Bender. "So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives."

One specific warning in the report is to avoid tuna from Latin American countries, particularly Ecuador, as it tested higher for mercury content than tuna produced in other countries.

Currently, American kids eat twice as much tuna as they do any other kind of fish, and one out of every six U.S. seafood meals is canned tuna.

"Fish, including tuna, is generally a nutritious part of a healthy diet," said Sarah Klein, staff attorney in the Food Safety program at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "But especially for our littlest, most vulnerable children, we have to make sure the risks from mercury in tuna don't outweigh tuna's benefits. We're urging parents and schools to limit children's tuna consumption and, when they do serve it, to choose lower-mercury options."

"As the report states, light tuna has one-third as much mercury as albacore does," said Eric Uram of Coalition for Safe Minds. "But contrary to the current federal fish consumption advisory, it is definitely not a low-mercury fish."

Dr. Groth, an environmental health scientist based in Pelham, New York, analyzed a variety of scenarios in which children of different ages ate different amounts of tuna with different mercury levels, and examined the relative exposure and risk from each scenario. Exposures in those scenarios ranged from less than one-quarter of to more than 40 times the current federal definition of safe exposure.

"Kids who eat tuna frequently can easily get very high mercury doses," says Dr. Groth. "Some of the larger doses are clearly far too high to be acceptable."

The mercury in tuna comes from two sources – human activities and natural processes.

Dr. Groth told ENS, "For billions of years mercury has been leaching out of the land. It occurs in rocks and in volcanic emissions. Since the Industrial Revolution, he explained, "humans have been putting mercury into air from coal burning. It falls into oceans and on rivers and wetlands. Once there, bacteria in those environments eat mercury and convert it to methylmercury – this compound gets into the food chain."

Methylmercury is absorbed by algae in ocean water and becomes more and more concentrated as it moves up the food chain – small animals eat the algae, small fish eat the small animals, medium fish eat the smaller fish and top predators such as tuna that eat the medium-sized fish have the highest concentrations of mercury in their bodies.

"This is largely a natural process responding to both natural and pollution inputs of mercury," said Groth. "If you look at mercury samples from the 19th century, they had mercury in their tuna too – it's a fact of life."

"It's a shame that such a great source of inexpensive protein is contaminated with mercury," says Dr. Catherine Thomasson, executive director of Physicians for Social Responsibility, which co-released the report. "To reduce risk, we need to both reduce children's exposure to tuna and reduce mercury pollution the majority of which is from coal-burning power plants."

With this in mind, the report recommends:

No child should eat tuna every day and children should not eat albacore tuna. Albacore or "white" tuna contains triple the mercury level of light tuna; nothing justifies tripling a child's mercury dose.

Children weighing more than 55 pounds should not eat more than two servings of light tuna per month. This amount of tuna (six ounces) is more than the average child currently consumes; the mercury dose it contains is acceptably low in risk.

Children up to 55 pounds should consume no more than one tuna meal per month. Because of their smaller body size, an added margin of caution is appropriate for younger children.

Parents and schools should offer children other seafood choices, such as shrimp and salmon, which are just as nutritious but contain far less mercury.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's School Lunch Program should phase out commodity purchases of canned tuna, and replace it with lower-mercury alternative seafood items and other extra-lean protein sources.

Parents should monitor their children's canned tuna consumption at school and ensure that the total consumed at home and at school does not exceed the recommendations for exposure.

"Tuna Surprise" was co-released Wednesday by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Coalition for Safe Minds, Environmental Health Strategy Centers, Got Mercury?, Clean Wisconsin, Massachusetts Clean Water Action, Vermont Public Interest Research Group and the European Environmental Bureau.

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 [Environment News Service \(http://s.tt/1omUV\)](http://s.tt/1omUV)

<http://ens-newswire.com/2012/09/20/tuna-loving-kids-at-risk-of-mercury-poisoning/>

## Activists Want Tuna Taken Off School Lunch Menus After Mercury Levels Discovered to Be Bonkers

 Lindy West

Out of all the foods that could be full of neurotoxins and dolphin ghosts—why does it always have to be *tuna*? Delicious, delicious tuna. Tuna is a wonder-food that comes either in a can or in a fish. The canned kind is cheap, and is where tuna melts come from, which makes it a national treasure. The fish kind is expensive, and is where sushi comes from, which makes me hungry right now. But, of course, this being the cruel practical joke known as "human existence," we probably shouldn't be eating either of them if we care at all about sustainable fisheries, dolphin murder, general ecologic collapse, and not ingesting large amounts of brain poison. Ugh. Under particular fire right now: canned tuna in school lunchrooms.

Consumer activist groups are looking to take tuna off of school lunch menus, citing wildly variable (and potentially unsafe) mercury levels in tests of canned tuna. The Vermont-based Mercury Policy Project tested 59 samples and found that while some were similar to the findings of previous FDA tests, certain samples far exceeded federal guidelines:

The levels of methylmercury were in general close to previous tests done by the Food and Drug Administration. However, levels of mercury varied widely, even from the same can or pouch. The average methylmercury content ranged from 0.02 to 0.64 parts per million in light tuna and between 0.19 and 1.27 parts per million in albacore tuna.

"On any given day in a given school, children eating the same meal could get mercury doses that vary by tenfold," just because of the variability of the chunk of meat in the packet," says Edward Groth, author of the report, released Wednesday. It was sponsored by several groups, including the Center for Science in the Public Interest and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

But, I mean, it tastes good, right? I don't *taste* any mercury. What's the worst that can happen—I turn into the Mad Hatter and get to have a hilarious tea party with a talking mouse (and unlimited tuna sandwiches!!!) until the end of time? That dude seems pretty happy—and *he's famous*.

But JK. Obv. Here's the best part of this whole kerfuffle: the inevitable backpedaling PR-pong between the anti-mercury people and the tuna lobby.

Tuna industry groups countered that canned tuna is safe and wholesome. The real public health issue is that "we don't eat enough" seafood, says Gavin Gibbons of the National Fisheries Institute, a seafood industry group in McLean, Va.

..."To suggest we're eating too much is almost comical," he says. Scaring children away from tuna "at a point in their life when they're developing their nutrition habits and their palates" is damaging.

Yyyyyyyyeah!!! The *real* problem with tuna being packed with unpredictable mercury levels is that we don't eat enough tuna! Quit damaging the children by taking away their DELICIOUS POISON FISH-WICHES. Feed them as many fish-wiches as their little mouths can hold! For AMERICA.

Or, don't do that at all:

Kids who eat a tuna sandwich a month aren't at risk but some children, "we don't know how many there are," love tuna and eat a lot of it, [Groth] says. Even four times a month could have "subtle adverse effects" on some children. "We're trying to put those kids on the map," he says.

Look. I don't know what we're supposed to do here. Everything we eat seems to be full of poison and everything we do seems to be terrible for the environment. So if you absolutely must eat delicious, delicious tuna fish (and I, personally, DO MUST), just [try to keep an eye on which fishes are sustainably caught](#), relatively poison-free, not from a disgusting parasite farm, and have a relatively low-impact on their habitat. Sigh. Tuna. A cruel mistress filled with brain-poison.

\*\*If *you're* a vulnerable fetus and/or hypochondriac who eats more than eight tuna sandwiches a month and you're wondering whether or not *you* have mercury poisoning, [here's a handy list of symptoms](#). Enjoy!

[Take tuna off school menus, group says](#) [USA Today]

<http://jezebel.com/5945035/activists-want-tuna-taken-off-school-lunch-menus-after-mercury-levels-discovered-to-be-bonkers>

# Canned Tuna Contains Mercury, Children Should Avoid

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S.C. Stringfellow

First Posted: Sep 20, 2012 01:36 PM EDT

School lunches already taste and look poisonous but in a new [report](#) released by the Mercury Policy Project, the surprise tuna surprise may actually be poisonous.

According to the report, canned tuna is the single largest source of methylmercury in the US diet, contributing 32 percent to the total, and is a major source of mercury exposure for children. US children eat twice as much tuna as they do of any other seafood product , and is the only tuna product used in school lunch dishes made with tuna.

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An inexpensive and highly nutritional alternative to other hot school lunches or even cold cut sandwiches, Parents frequently buy the canned good even though previous studies have warned against its potential mercury contamination.

Children who love the canned fish eat more than 100 grams a month and, combined with their body weight ,researchers say this can result in mercury doses for some children that exceed federal safety guidelines and, in some cases, can be lethal.

The Project obtained 59 samples of canned tuna from this market sector in 11 states around the country, and sent them to a contract lab for mercury testing .

The tests found that 50 of the cans tested contained imported tuna and had higher amounts of mercury compared to the 9 cans that contained U.S. raised tuna, with Ecuador imported brands containing the highest average yet. The study also showed the average mercury content in light tuna samples ranged from 0.020 to 0.640  $\mu\text{g/g}$ ; in albacore, from 0.190 to 1.270  $\mu\text{g/g}$  .

Results further illustrated that two of the most renowned U.S brands of tuna , StarKist and Chicken of the Sea, accounted for 60 percent of our light tuna samples with an overall average mercury levels in the two brands were 0.131 and 0.126  $\mu\text{g/g}$ , respectively .

The report recommends that all children should not eat albacore student and eat light tuna no more than once a month; those children who are tuna-lovers should still only eat it no more than twice amount.

Additionally, tuna should not be served on the school lunch menu more than twice a month and parents should be conscious of when those days are so as to avoid exposing children to tuna twice a day. Lastly, parents should attempt to introduce their children to other forms of sea food. But the safest option is for parents and schools to avoid tuna completely.

Lastly the report lists that the FDA and The US Department of Agriculture should expeditiously complete their ongoing effort to revise their joint advisory on seafood consumption and mercury exposure.

Read more at <http://www.counselheal.com/articles/2898/20120920/canned-tuna-contains-mercury-children-adoid.htm#d7rLgXLFcZ32fE2a.99>

## **Tuna: Kids should only eat tuna once or twice a month, Mercury Policy Project says**

A new report from the Mercury Policy Project says kids should only eat light tuna once or twice a month to keep their mercury intake at a safe level.

Photographer: AP Graphics Bank

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Posted: 09/19/2012

- By: Jacque Wilson CNN

(CNN) -- Parents, take note: A new report from the Mercury Policy Project says kids should only eat light tuna once or twice a month to keep their mercury intake at a safe level.

Report author Dr. Edward Groth analyzed 59 tuna samples from around the country, including a few school districts. He recommends kids who weigh less than 55 pounds eat light tuna only once a month; kids more than 55 pounds can eat tuna twice a month.

Children should avoid eating white albacore tuna all together, the group says, as it was found to have triple the amount of mercury as light tuna. The brand of tuna doesn't seem to matter, as Groth found varying levels of mercury in each can he tested.

Mercury has been linked to cognitive decline in infants. There have been no epidemiological studies on the effects of mercury in children in the United States, according to Groth, but scientists suspect that the chemical harms developing kids the same way it's been shown to harm fetuses.

Although there are still a lot of uncertainties, "We think people need advice now," Groth said.

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Read more: <http://www.wptv.com/dpp/money/consumer/tuna-kids-should-only-eat-tuna-once-or-twice-a-month-mercury-policy-project-says#ixzz28FphlGOJ>

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## [Diet & Nutrition](#)

Tuna in schools often high in mercury, study finds

Sep 20, 2012 11:00 AM

Canned white tuna served in schools has higher than expected levels of mercury, according to a study released yesterday. Our [previous research](#) found similar concerns for canned tuna purchased in grocery stores.

Some children may be at greater risk from mercury in tuna than previously thought, according to the report, which prepared by the Mercury Policy Project, a research effort co-sponsored by the Center for Science in the Public Interest and eight other consumer and environmental groups. Independent studies indicate that mercury causes adverse effects at much lower levels of exposure than previously indicated.

The team of researchers tested the mercury content of 59 samples, representing eight brands of tuna, sold to schools in 11 states. Mercury levels in both white (albacore) and light tuna were highly variable from sample to sample, according to the report. While mercury levels were similar to what has been reported for canned tuna sold in supermarkets, the average mercury level in 11 samples of white tuna served in schools was much higher than the Food and Drug Administration's reported average, according to the report.

Test results also found that the 48 samples of light tuna averaged slightly lower mercury levels than the FDA's reported average.

"Kids who eat tuna frequently can easily get very high mercury doses," said Ned Groth, Ph.D., an environmental health scientist who prepared the report. "Some of the larger doses are clearly far too high to be acceptable."

Based on the findings, the researchers advise schools and parents not to serve any white tuna to kids and to limit consumption of light tuna to twice a month for most kids and only once a month for children under 55 pounds.

**Bottom line:** Only a small fraction of children probably eat enough tuna to be at risk, according to the report. But parents should monitor their children's canned tuna consumption at home and at school and offer them other seafood choices, such as shrimp and salmon, which are just as nutritious as tuna but contain far less mercury.

See our story, [Mercury in Canned Tuna Still a Concern](#), including [Lower Mercury Choices](#). And see our advice for [healthy school lunches](#).

## Source

[Popular Children's Lunch Contains Hidden Danger, Groups Warn](#) [CSPI]

—*Doug Podolsky*

<http://news.consumerreports.org/health/2012/09/albacore-served-in-schools-may-pose-higher-than-expected-risks.html>

# Elevated Mercury Levels in Canned Tuna Sold to Schools

September 19, 2012 [0 Comments](#)

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MONTPELIER, Vt.—A coalition of consumer groups is asking the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to phase out commodity purchases of canned tuna for schools, and replace it with lower-mercury alternative seafood items and other extra-lean protein sources after a new study from the Mercury Policy Project (MPP) found highly variable levels of mercury in tuna samples.

[The “Tuna Surprise” report](#), co-released by the [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#) (CSPI), Physicians for Social Responsibility, Safe Minds, and several other public health, consumer and environmental groups, advised schools and parents not to serve any albacore tuna to kids and to limit consumption of light tuna to twice a month for most kids and only once a month for children under 55 pounds. Albacore or “white” tuna had triple the mercury levels than did “light” tuna, and mercury levels in both types were highly variable.

“Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk,” said Michael Bender, MPP’s director. “So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives.”

According to the report, canned tuna is by far the largest source of methylmercury in the U.S. diet and accounts for nearly one-third of Americans’ total exposure to this toxic mercury compound.

MPP tested the mercury content of 59 samples, representing eight brands of tuna, sold to schools in 11 states around the country. Researchers analyzed a variety of scenarios in which children of different ages ate different amounts of tuna with different mercury levels, and examined the relative exposure and risk from each scenario. Exposures in those scenarios ranged from less than one-quarter of to more than 40 times the current federal definition of safe exposure. There was no difference in the brand of tuna.

“Kids who eat tuna frequently can easily get very high mercury doses,” said Ned Groth, Ph.D., an environmental health scientist, who helped analyze the data. “Some of the larger doses are clearly far too high to be acceptable.”

[Click here](#) to access the full report.

<http://www.foodproductdesign.com/news/2012/09/elevated-mercury-levels-in-canned-tuna-sold-to-sc.aspx>

## Tuna in School Lunches May Pose Danger to Children

September 20, 2012 By [Linda Larsen](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

The [Mercury Policy Project](#) has issued the first ever report on testing for mercury in tuna sold to the nation’s schools. The [report](#), titled “Tuna Surprise: Mercury in School Lunches”, states that canned tuna is the largest source of methyl mercury in the U.S. diet and is a major source of mercury exposure for children.” U.S. children eat twice as much tuna as they do of any fish or seafood.

This high consumption rate, coupled with children’s low body weights, can result in doses of mercury that exceed federal safety standards. No previous research has documented mercury levels in tuna served in schools.

The Project bought 59 samples of canned tuna in 11 states around the country and tested them for mercury. The average mercury level in light tuna was 0.118 micrograms/gram, which was slightly lower than the FDA’s reported average of 0.128 micrograms/gram. The samples of albacore tuna averaged 0.560 micrograms/gram, much higher than the FDA’s reported average of 0.350 micrograms/gram. Most of the samples, 50 out of the 59, contained tuna imported from other countries.

Scientists then modeled an exposure chart to assess the risks from consumption of this tuna. The amount of mercury consumed in various amounts of tuna eaten were compared. If children eat tuna once a day, no matter how small the amount, their risk level is the highest, more than four times the Reference Dose with no upper limit.

Based on that model, they have issued the following recommendations: Children should not eat albacore tuna. That species contains triple the mercury content found in light tuna. Smaller children, who weigh less than 55 pounds, should eat light tuna no more than once a month. Schools and parents should limit most children's light tuna consumption to twice a month. Children should never be allowed to eat tuna every day. Schools and parents should teach children to enjoy other types of seafood such as shrimp, salmon, and fish fillets. And parents whose children eat tuna once a week or more should have the child's blood tested for mercury.

The report also recommends that the USDA should phase out subsidies for tuna in the school lunch program. They state that "there is no sound reason why taxpayer dollars should be used to subsidize any part of this risk. Over time, canned tuna can be replaced with low-mercury seafood (e.g. salmon, shrimp) and other protein sources."

The Mercury Policy Project has advice for the EPA and FDA too. Those bodies should complete their ongoing effort to revise the joint advisory on seafood consumption and mercury exposure, and must address the issue of short-term exposure "spikes". Schools should try to avoid buying tuna from Ecuador and other Latin American studies, since products from that area has above-average mercury levels. Finally, the FDA should try to figure out why its reported mercury levels in albacore tuna are so much lower than the levels in other studies.

<http://foodpoisoningbulletin.com/2012/tuna-in-school-lunches-may-pose-danger-to-children/>

## **No Tuna? Should Tuna Get Canned from School Lunch Menus? Mercury Policy Project Reveals New Findings**

### **Albacore Tuna Can Triple a Child's Exposure to Mercury**

By *Judy Feldman* | September 21, 2012 2:32 PM EDT

The [Mercury Policy Project](#) of Montpelier, Vermont has just announced new findings, and is now encouraging the U.S. Department of Agriculture to scrap tuna from school lunch menus, according to USANews Today. They conducted a recent test and study that involved about 60 sample cans of tunas, sold to schools in 11 separate states, which were found to have extremely varying amounts of mercury - some of which were far above federal guidelines.

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"On any given day in a given school, children eating the same meal could get mercury doses that vary by tenfold," just because of the variability of the chunk of meat in the packet," said Edward Groth, author of the report, in a prepared statement released Wednesday. The report was sponsored by several groups, including the [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#) and [Physicians for Social Responsibility](#).

Currently, The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) suggests that the maximum acceptable dose for methylmercury is one-tenth of a microgram per kilogram of an individual's body weight. According to the study just released by Mercury Policy Project, the average methylmercury

content ranged from 0.02 to 0.64 parts per million in [light tuna](#), and between 0.19 and 1.27 parts per million in [albacore](#) tuna.

And, as reported by USA Today, many EPA scientists say that even the tiniest levels of methylmercury have been tied to learning disabilities as well as developmental delays.

According to [WXYZ](#), "Many researchers claim [children should never even eat albacore tuna](#) at all, because they believe the risk of mercury exposure far outweighs any potential nutritional benefits."

Another new Canadian study, just released on September 21st, also has found that young children exposed to certain heavy metals [such as mercury and lead] are considered to be at higher risk for problems with attention and behavior later in life, that kids with mercury poisoning have shown they have trouble with language skills, attention, and coordination, as well as other problems, and lead affects learning and memory. (To read more about the Canadian study. and the mercury to ADHD links, here, at [WebMD Health News](#).)

**Timing, and Politics also have a part to play.** This call to phase out tuna from school lunches comes at a crucial time not only for tuna, for food prices, but also for school lunches, period. And there's politics, to boot. A current controversy is on-going to prevent the full implementation of "new" [USDA school lunch requirements](#) -- announced in January and the first major nutritional overhaul of [school meals](#) in more than 15 years -- that would - in addition to [offering less sodium and more whole grains, fruits and vegetables](#) - impose age-aligned calorie maximums on meals. (Reps. Steve King (R-Iowa) and Tim Huelskamp (R-Kansas) have just [introduced legislation that would repeal the calorie limits](#).)

As reported by the [Huffingtonpost](#), last January, it was to have been a good move for menus for school lunches, and would bring down sodium over the next ten years. First lady Michelle Obama and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack had announced the new guidelines. She was also joined by celebrity chef Rachael Ray. The consensus was agreed: youngsters will learn better if they don't have growling stomachs at school.

The controversy about tuna goes beyond light or dark, or albacore or not. Back in 2004, the EPA and the FDA said that women who are pregnant or might be pregnant can eat up to two meals, or 12 ounces, of fish and [shellfish](#) a week. Children should eat "smaller portions," the guidelines said. But since then, some studies indicate it may even be too high. "Our research suggests that the limit should be decreased by 50%," reportedly Philippe Grandjean, a professor of environmental studies at Harvard University who studies mercury in [seafood](#), has said. "If anything, [the Mercury Project] report underestimates the risks associated with regular tuna intake."

However, others disagree. For example, according to USA Today, [scientists such as Michael Crawford](#) have provided years of evidence that fatty acids available in fish are critical to a child's cognitive functions. His work, and that of others, has shown that children lacking these essential fatty acids will negatively affect children's behavior and increase risk of mental health issues.

Plus, Gavin Gibbons of the National Fisheries Institute, a seafood industry group in McLean, Va., reminds the public that the current federal dietary guidelines actually [recommend Americans eat seafood twice a week](#), that seafood is a healthy protein with omega-3 fatty acids that benefit metabolism as well as brain function and development. "To suggest we're eating too much is almost comical," he told USA Today.

<http://www.isciencetimes.com/articles/3817/20120921/tuna-canned-school-lunch-menus-mercury-policy.htm>

*Nutrition & Public Health*

## Report Says Tuna Could Be Dangerous for School Kids

by [Dan Flynn](#) | Sep 20, 2012

Tuna-loving school kids are at risk for mercury poisoning, according to a new report sponsored by several public health, consumer and environmental groups.

"Most children are already consuming only modest amounts of tuna and are not at significant risk," said Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project (MPP). "So the focus really needs to be on kids who eat tuna often, to limit their mercury exposure by offering them lower-mercury seafood or other nutritious alternatives."

In its report called "Tuna Surprise," MPP's first tests of canned tuna sold to schools assesses the exposure of children to mercury in canned tuna. Here's what it concludes:

- School children should not eat albacore tuna. Albacore or "white" tuna, according to MMP, contains three times more mercury than light tuna. The report says there is no justification for tripling a child's mercury dose.
- Children weighing less than 55 pounds should consume no more than one tuna meal per month. MMP says the less body weight requires an added margin of caution, especially appropriate for young children.
- Children weighing more than 55 pounds should limit their tuna intake to two servings per month. This amount is more than the average child currently consumes and the mercury dose it contains is an acceptably low risk.
- Tuna-loving children should be the "focus of risk management efforts" including taking steps to prevent children from daily consumption of tuna. Parents and schools should offer children other

seafood choices, including shrimp and salmon. These choices are just as nutritious but with lower mercury levels.

- USDA should phase out the purchase of canned tuna and replace it with low mercury seafood alternatives.

- Parents should monitor the canned tuna consumption of their children to make sure their home and school consumption does not exceed recommendations for exposure.

In the report, MPP tested the content of 59 samples representing eight brands of tuna sold to schools in 11 states.

"As far as we know, no one has previously tested this market sector," said Bender.

Testing showed that mercury levels of tuna sold to schools were similar to those in tuna sold by supermarkets. Albacore or "white" tuna had the higher levels of mercury than "light" tuna. Mercury levels in both types were said to be highly variable.

Clinical methylmercury poisoning is rare in America, but the "Tuna Surprise" study said such cases do exist.

Mercury in tuna has been a concern for years, with the best health advice usually centering on limiting one's intake. This new study, co-sponsored by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), focuses on some children that may be at greater risk than others.

"Fish, including tuna, is generally a nutritious part of a healthy diet," says Sarah Klein, staff attorney for the food safety program at CSPI. "But especially for our littlest, most vulnerable children, we have to make sure the risks from mercury in tuna don't outweigh tuna's benefits. We're urging parents and schools to limit children's tuna consumption and, when they do serve it, to choose lower-mercury options."

Eric Uram of Safe Minds, another sponsor, said light tuna contains one-third as much mercury as albacore or "white" tuna. And the Tuna Surprise report clearly focuses on canned tuna as the largest source of mercury in the American diet.

On the positive side of the debate, it said canned tuna is an inexpensive and nutritious source of low-fat protein. Americans eat twice as much canned tuna than any other kind of fish. One in every six seafood meals includes canned tuna.

"Kids who eat tuna frequently can easily get very high mercury doses," said Ned Groth, an environmental health scientist. He analyzed for the report various scenarios in which children of different ages ate different amounts of tuna with different mercury levels.

"Some of the larger doses are clearly far too high to be acceptable," Groth said.

Included in his study were levels from one quarter to more than 40 times the current federal levels for safe exposure.

A spokesman for the Physicians for Social Responsibility said, "It is a shame that such a great source of inexpensive protein is contaminated with mercury." In the meantime, he said, reducing children's exposure to tuna and controlling mercury pollution with fewer coal-fired power plants will be necessary.

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<http://www.foodsafetynews.com/2012/09/home-school-tuna-consumption-needs-attention/#.UGxpa1HmWgU>

### **Tuna trouble in Vt. schools?**

*Posted: Sep 19, 2012 5:48 PM EDT Updated: Sep 21, 2012 5:00 PM EDT*

By Gina Bullard - [bio](#) | [email](#)

MONTPELIER, Vt. -

Whether it's tuna salad, tuna pea wiggle or tuna surprise, canned tuna can pop up on school lunch menus.

"A hidden risk in school lunches that parents need to be aware of," said Michael Bender of the Mercury Policy Project.

The Mercury Policy Project in Montpelier says kids who weigh less than 66 pounds who eat tuna more than once a month can have impaired brain development. They say the limit for kids who weigh more than 66 pounds should be two tuna servings a month. That's based on research from 59 school tuna samples in 11 states including Vermont. The group tested light tuna and albacore; albacore has three times the level of mercury.

"We're recommending no albacore be served to children in schools and that light tuna only be served once or twice a month in schools, depending on body weight of the child," Bender said.

The group also found that in samples from tuna used in schools, mercury levels can vary widely based on the fish, meaning each child could be getting a different amount of mercury.

"What we're looking at is Russian roulette when it comes to serving canned tuna at school and at home," Bender said.

"It's disappointing that school lunches are taking a bad rap in the public view," said Laurie Colgan, the director of child nutrition at the Vt. Education Department.

Colgan says this report is an unfair attack on the state's healthy and nutritious school lunches.

"The occasional service of tuna is not hazardous and it hasn't brought about an FDA warning to recall or limit tuna," she said.

Colgan says the amount of tuna being served in Vermont schools meets federal safety levels. She also says schools don't use tuna that much because it's expensive and not that popular. For example, of the thousands of students in the Burlington school district, only about 30 eat tuna each week-- mostly middle and high schoolers.

"We see most of it now being used in deli bars as well as a few salad bars," Colgan said.

A canned tuna food fight that may be over. The state education department says it has no plans to change the menu.

The Mercury Policy Project wants kids to switch to other sources of fish with lower mercury levels like salmon and shrimp.

<http://www.wcax.com/story/19588348/tuna-troubles-in-school-lunches>

## Group Calls for Limit on Kids' Tuna Intake

By Kristina Fiore, Staff Writer, MedPage Today

Published: September 21, 2012

Kids should skip albacore tuna and shouldn't eat "light" tuna more than twice a month, according to a Vermont-based advocacy group.

The canned fish could contain high doses of mercury that are especially harmful to small bodies, Edward Groth, PhD, and colleagues at the Mercury Policy Project wrote in their report "Tuna Surprise: Mercury in School Lunches."

The group tested 59 samples of canned tuna, both light and albacore, and found an average mercury content of 0.118 mcg/g and 0.56 mcg/g, respectively, per can. While the levels for light tuna are similar to those measured by the FDA, Groth and colleagues wrote, the albacore levels were higher than the FDA's calculation of 0.35 mcg/g that it has used to set policy.

FDA maintains that adults can eat up to 12 oz. per week -- that's about two meals -- of seafood that's low in mercury, including tuna, and that kids should just have "smaller portions." However, albacore tuna should be limited to 6 oz. per week, the agency said.

Recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics are similar, limiting kids' albacore tuna intake to no more than 6 oz. per week, according to an organization spokesperson.

Groups that support the Mercury Policy Project's ban on albacore tuna for kids include the Centers for Science in the Public Interest and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

The groups also call for limiting smaller children to having light tuna just once a month and encourage seafood alternatives with lower mercury content -- including salmon and shrimp -- for all kids.

Also, if children eat tuna once a week or more, parents should have their kids' blood tested for mercury levels, they urged.

The report also called on the Department of Agriculture to phase out subsidies for tuna in school lunch programs.

Jerome Paulson, MD, of the Children's National Medical Center in Washington and chair of the AAP's council on environmental health, told *MedPage Today* that, for now, parents should stick to the FDA and AAP guidance, especially since the Mercury Policy Project only sampled 59 cans of tuna.

"The FDA needs to examine a large sample of canned tuna and find out if these numbers are truly representative," Paulson said. "They should do that in fairly short order. This isn't something that should take a year or 2 to do. Then the recommendations may need to be adjusted on the basis of what a large-scale sample shows."

<http://www.medpagetoday.com/PublicHealthPolicy/EnvironmentalHealth/34897>

Children Should Not be Given Tuna-Rich Food; Exposure to Mercury Could be Dangerous

Submitted by [Satish Karat](#) on Thu, 09/20/2012 - 12:32



Recently, a study has been released by the Mercury Policy Project (MPP) according to which mercury in tuna is lethal for children. This study was named Tuna Surprise.

In the U. S. diet, canned tuna is known as the commonly used source of methylmercury and around one-third of Americans are exposed to this toxic mercury compound through either of their daily meals. For conducting this study, around 59 samples containing mercury were tested and out of these, eight brands were of tuna.

According to this report, co-released by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, Safe Minds, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and several other public health, consumer and

environmental groups, schools and parents are requested not to serve children with any kind of albacore tuna.

Moreover, they were asked to ensure that the consumption of light tuna should not be more than twice a month for adult kids and as far as smaller children are concerned who are under 55 pounds, they should be given the product only once a month.

As said by Michael Bender, MPP's director, a number of children consume tuna in smaller quantities and therefore they are at a lower risk. It is basically those kids who eat tuna in big quantities or on a regular basis, who are at a greater risk and therefore needs to be offered lower-mercury seafood.

<http://topnews.us/content/250705-children-should-not-be-given-tuna-rich-food-exposure-mercury-could-be-dangerous>

## **Groups Urge Tuna to be taken off School Menus**

Posted by [david](#) on Sep 21st, 2012 // [No Comments](#)

Different consumer groups have urged the U.S. Department of Agriculture to eliminate tuna from the menu in school lunchrooms across the United States. The groups are urging this, following tests conducted on tuna that is used in schools that discovered variable amounts of mercury in the tuna.

In some of the tuna tested, the mercury level was higher than federal governmental guidelines. Tuna industry groups countered the comments made by consumer groups saying that tuna was not only safe, but also very wholesome. One tuna representative said that the biggest problem is that not enough tuna or other seafood is consumed by Americans.

In Montpelier, Vermont, the non-profit group Mercury Policy Projects attempts to reduce the mercury content in the overall environment. Tests were performed by the project on 59 samples of school tuna that came in institutional sized cans and foil pouches.

Tests were conducted in 11 states and the methylmercury levels in general were near prior tests that had been performed by the U.S. FDA. However, the levels of methylmercury varied, even from within the same can or pouch. The content range of methylmercury on average was between 0.02 and 0.64 in light tuna, while it was 0.19 to 1.27 in albacore tuna. The figures are based on parts per million.

Advocacy groups worry that children, on any given day of the week, could ingest higher amounts of mercury than the government has set for guidelines. Americans are urged by dietary guidelines from the government to eat seafood a minimum of twice each week. Seafood is high

in omega-3 and healthy protein. However, the average American only consumes seafood less than one time each week on average.

<http://www.healthaim.com/groups-urge-tuna-to-be-taken-off-school-menus/>

## **Consumer Groups: Eliminate Tuna from School Menu**

Posted on 21. Sep, 2012 by [Paije Klatt](#) in [Health](#)

*September 21, 2012* - A number of consumer groups are recommending that the Department of Agriculture in the U.S. take tuna off the school lunchroom menus. The urging by the groups follows tests that were done on tuna used at the schools that found a variable range of levels of mercury.

In some of the Tuna, the level of mercury was higher than guidelines set by the federal government. Groups representing the tuna industry countered that tuna in a can is wholesome and safe. One representative from the tuna industry said the real problem was that not enough seafood was eaten by people in the U.S.

A non-profit group in Montpelier, Vermont the Mercury Policy Project works to reduce the amount of mercury in our environment. The project tested 59 different samples of tuna in cans that were institution size and in foil pouches.

The tests were done in 11 states. The level of methylmercury in general was close to prior tests performed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Nevertheless, the levels varied widely of the mercury, even from the same pouch or can. On average, the methylmercury had a content range from 0.02 parts per million to 0.64 parts per million in the light tuna and between 0.19 parts and 1.27 parts in the albacore tuna.

The groups are worried that on a given day children could received much more mercury than guidelines allow. Federal dietary guidelines suggest Americans consume seafood twice per week because of its omega-3 content and healthy protein, but on average Americans only eat seafood less than once per week.

<http://akgulian.com/consumer-groups-eliminate-tuna-from-school-menu/212294/>

## **Researchers highlight presence of methylmercury in canned tuna**

20-Sep-2012

Canned tuna is by far the largest source of methylmercury in the US diet "and likely to be so in some EU countries as well," according to a report published by the Mercury Policy Project.

The study examined the levels of methylmercury in tuna sold to schools in 11 states in the US and the potential risks of this exposure to children. The scientists conclude that given the fact that "several recent studies have shown that mercury doses around or even below the US reference dose can have adverse effects on brain development," children should only be allowed to eat a limited amount of the food.

Current safety standards and US federal advice are therefore "scientifically out of date and urgently need updating," the study concludes.

<http://chemicalwatch.com/12387/researchers-highlight-presence-of-methylmercury-in-canned-tuna>

## Mercury levels in canned tuna should prompt caution among parents, schools

EDITORIAL | EDITORIAL

THIS STORY APPEARED IN

*The Boston Globe*

September 25, 2012

Sorry, Charlie, but parents of school children should be careful how much tuna they eat. The canned version of the fish is the single largest source of mercury in the American diet, even though the federal government subsidizes the nutritious food in school lunch programs on the assumption that levels of the neurotoxin are safe. But a new risk-management report by the Mercury Policy Project vigorously argues otherwise.

Based in Montpelier, the environmental advocacy group says it found such high levels of mercury in school-lunch tuna in several states, including Massachusetts, that no children should eat albacore tuna — or “white” tuna — at all. As for “light” tuna, which is mostly skipjack and yellowfin, mercury levels were lower, but still high enough that the project recommended no more than one serving a month for children under 55 pounds and no more than twice a month for others.

The project said it found that albacore mercury levels were much higher than in federal analyses, prompting a recommendation that the Department of Agriculture should phase out tuna subsidies and that school systems should seek alternatives. The agriculture department should at least explore the possibility that its analyses underestimated the mercury risk.

Tuna companies insist their products are safe. StarKist's website says the levels of mercury in its albacore are "far below" federal safety standards. Chicken of the Sea's website Q & A on mercury reads, "Are children at increased risk? . . . No." But the project points out that, with canned tuna being a school cafeteria staple, American children eat twice as much of the fish as any other seafood, enough that mercury doses in small children can exceed federal standards. In the old StarKist ads, Charlie, a cartoon tuna character, was never quite tasty enough for choosy StarKist. Today, parents and schools need to be choosy about how they use canned tuna.