

Frequently Asked Questions for Press Release:

NCDHHS Recommends Limiting Fish Consumption from the Middle and Lower Cape Fear River Due to Contamination With “Forever Chemicals” (sent July 13, 2023)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What health effects does the fish consumption advisory protect against?

There are a range of documented health effects from exposure to different PFAS chemicals, including harms to the immune system, the cardiovascular system and children’s development, as well as increased risk of cancer, as summarized on the [NCDHHS PFAS webpage](#). NCDHHS developed the advisories using the new USEPA reference dose for PFOS from March 2023, which incorporates the most current data to minimize the risk to human health across this range of potential impacts. It is important to note that this advisory does not take into account the health benefits of eating fish.

What about cancer?

The fish advisories will minimize the risk of cancer and non-cancer health outcomes. NCDHHS used the reference dose provided by the EPA in its [proposed maximum contaminant level goal](#) for PFOS documentation applicable to non-cancer outcomes. In this case, using the non-cancer reference dose as a starting point for the calculation of the fish advisories is more protective than basing the calculations on cancer risk.

I’ve been eating fish all my life. Should I visit my doctor and/or be tested?

Residents with concerns about possible health effects of PFAS exposures can use this [NCDHHS Clinician Memo](#) to discuss these concerns with their health care provider.

Why do you have a separate advisory for susceptible populations including pregnant women and children?

Similar to our statewide mercury advisory, we developed a separate advisory for vulnerable populations because research shows there are potential harms to children’s development, both in utero (while the mother is pregnant) and in childhood. We wanted to highlight that these populations may be more sensitive to contaminants in the environment.

Why did you select these fish species for analysis?

According to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, these are the freshwater fish most commonly caught and consumed from the Cape Fear River.

Are other fish safe to eat?

These are the fish for which we currently have data, but it is likely the other species contain similar levels of PFOS based on this data and information about fish from [other states](#).

Do these advisories apply to tributaries of the Cape Fear River as well?

These advisories are based on locations along the Cape Fear River where NCDHHS has fish tissue data, which does not include the tributaries at this time. However, similar levels of PFOS have been found in fish collected in other waterbodies across the country. While there is not sufficient data to develop advisories for other locations, people should be aware fish from other locations, including those caught in tributaries in the region of the Cape Fear River, might contain PFOS.

Will you be developing advisories for the saltwater areas of the lower Cape Fear River?

The first step was to measure PFAS contamination in freshwater fish from the middle and lower Cape Fear River. NCDHHS is working with NCDEQ and will assess results from saltwater fish when the data become available.

Are there other contaminants of concern in fish in this part of the Cape Fear?

There are other fish consumption advisories that affect multiple sections of the Cape Fear and its tributaries, including advisories for mercury and other heavy metals. Please refer to the Occupational and Environmental Branch's site-specific [fish consumption advisory webpage](#) for information on these advisories and the [mercury webpage](#) for information regarding the state-wide mercury advisory.

How does this compare to advisories from other states?

PFOS concentrations were similar to those measured in fish from other states. Advisories in other states range from "do not eat" to one meal per week depending on the levels of PFOS that were detected, and the reference dose used in the calculations. While NC is not the first state to issue a fish advisory for PFOS, we are the first state to use the new PFOS reference dose from the EPA, which became available in March 2023. This new reference dose is considerably lower than reference doses used in other states' calculations, resulting in more restrictive advisories than if earlier reference doses had been used.

Are the PFAS chemicals you measured in fish from the Chemours plant or other sources?

This effort was intended to measure PFAS concentrations in fish, not identify sources of contamination. We know there are multiple sources of PFAS throughout the Cape Fear River watershed and beyond.

The EPA has proposed new drinking water standards for PFOA as well as PFOS. What about PFOA in fish?

[PFOA](#) is another type of PFAS chemical with known toxicity, but it was detected in less than five freshwater fish from our sampling throughout the lower Cape Fear, so it did not meet our threshold for developing an advisory.

Does this mean that fishing in these parts of the Cape Fear River is prohibited?

No. This fish consumption advisory is intended to help people understand potential risks and make the best decisions for themselves and their families. It does not create any legal or regulatory restrictions on fishing or fish consumption.

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