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## **Elevated levels of mercury in sport-caught fish from Galesville Reservoir, Douglas County**

The public is being advised today of elevated mercury levels in the meat of fish caught from Galesville Reservoir located east of Azalea in southern Douglas County. The advisory is issued by the Health Division of the Oregon Department of Human Services in cooperation with the Oregon Departments of Environmental Quality and Fish and Wildlife and the Douglas County Health Department.

The advisory is based on mercury tests of meat of fish sampled and analyzed by the Department of Environmental Quality's laboratory. Mercury levels in the reservoir are sufficient to pose a health concern for persons who regularly or frequently eat fish caught there, according to Ken Kauffman, environmental health specialist at the Health Division. Children, pregnant and nursing women, and women of child-bearing age are especially susceptible to mercury effects. The advisory aims to prevent brain and nerve injury to growing fetuses, infants and small children; and to protect older children and adults from injury to their nervous systems, livers and kidneys.

The average level of mercury found in fish from this reservoir is 0.69 parts per million (ppm), Kauffman said. Some individual fish were found to have levels as high as 0.86 ppm. The Health Division generally issues advisories when the average mercury level in fish meat from a particular water body is 0.35 ppm or greater.

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The Health Division recommends that persons limit their eating of fish from Galesville Reservoir as follows:

- ✓ Children 6 years of age and younger should not eat more than one 4-ounce meal every seven weeks; and
- ✓ Women of child-bearing age, including pregnant and breast-feeding women should not eat more than one 8-ounce meal per month; and
- ✓ Women past child-bearing age, children older than 6 years of age, and all other healthy adults may safely consume as much as one 8-ounce meal per week.

The mercury in the fish is believed to be from natural mercury in soil and rocks of the area and in the watershed above the reservoir. Mercury leaches and erodes slowly from soil and rocks and accumulates in sediments of water bodies. Once mercury enters the food chain it accumulates in fish and other resident organisms. Mercury levels are not expected to diminish or disappear from the reservoir in the foreseeable future. If further testing shows significant changes in mercury levels in the fish, the Health Division will update the advisory.

The mercury levels in the water itself is not great enough to pose hazards for activities or uses other than eating of fish and other creatures from the reservoir. There is no reason to believe that drinking water wells in the area are unsafe, but persons who are concerned about their drinking water can have well water analyzed by a commercial testing laboratory.

Anglers are encouraged to practice catch-and-release fishing in this reservoir, especially with larger specimens of any kind of fish because mercury tends to be found at higher levels in the older, larger fish. Because mercury is bound within the muscle tissue, it cannot be removed or significantly reduced by cleaning methods, washing, cooking, brining, smoking or other processing techniques.

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