

# Overview of Focus Groups

Consumer Advisory on  
Methylmercury

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## Methylmercury (MeHg) Consumer Advisory

- Message for:
  - Pregnant women
  - Women who may become pregnant
  - Nursing mothers
  - Young children



## What are focus groups?

- Qualitative research with beginnings in WWII
- Small group discussions of 5-10 people with certain common characteristics
- Purpose is to find out what the target audience thinks and feels about an issue, product, or service

## 8 Focus Groups

- Calverton, Maryland; New Orleans, Louisiana; Seattle, Washington; and Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Mixed gender and education groups; pregnant women; parents of young children; women of childbearing age
- Held November, 2003
- Iterative Process

## Focus Groups' Goals

- Examine risk communication formats
- Gauge consumer response to advice
  - Enhanced attention to young children
  - Merging commercial and noncommercial fish
  - Discussing tuna



## Balance

- Minimize the risks from methylmercury in fish
- Not jeopardize the health benefits from eating fish



## FINDINGS: Most people want a simple message

- Methylmercury may harm a child's development if consumed in high amounts
- What should be done to avoid high amounts

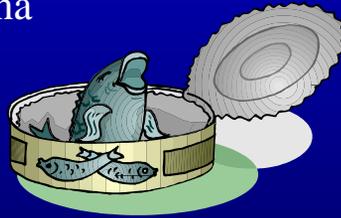


## FINDINGS: Some people want more information

- Want to know how methylmercury will affect the health of their baby or child
- Want to know data about particular species of fish
- Want to know how methylmercury will affect others

## What about tuna?

- Information about the difference in methylmercury content in tuna steaks and albacore tuna versus light tuna was new to some participants
- Some participants said they would avoid tuna steaks and albacore tuna



## What about Recreational Fish?

- Avoiding commercial fish when consuming recreational fish was new information
- Some participants think of fish consumption as a whole; don't separate commercial and sport caught fish



## What will participants do?

- Almost all participants reported that they will avoid species identified as DO NOT EAT
- Some participants will eat less fish
- Some participants will serve less fish to their children



## What will participants do? Cont'd

- Spillover effect – Many participants will tell others about the risks of fish because if fish can be risky for pregnant women, it probably isn't good for other people.



## CONCLUSION

- Women will not exceed the safe fish consumption advice
- The challenge will be to ensure that women, and the children they care for, continue to eat fish as an important protein and nutrient source in their diet