



Pat Quinn, Governor
LaMar Hasbrouck, MD, MPH, Director

525-535 West Jefferson Street • Springfield, Illinois 62761-0001 • www.idph.state.il.us

Consumer Advisory

Illinois Department of Public Health Warns of Buffalo Fish Causing Illness

Rare disease suspected in two people

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is advising people who eat buffalo fish of the potential to contract a rare disease called Haff disease. Health officials in Chicago and Cook County have reported two people who consumed the fish having been seen at the hospital as suspect cases of Haff disease.

Haff disease is a swelling and breakdown of skeletal muscle thought to be caused by a toxin sometimes found in buffalo fish in the Mississippi River. Symptoms of Haff disease generally begin within 6 to 21 hours after eating fish and commonly include severe muscle pain, stiffness and brown (darkened) urine. Acute kidney failure may also be a complication. Symptoms typically resolve within 2 to 3 days and cases are rarely fatal.

“Haff disease is very rare, with the last case in Illinois reported in 2004,” said IDPH Director Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck. “While cooking food to the proper temperature will kill bacteria, cooking will not eliminate this toxin and the fish will still be unsafe to eat.”

If you think you may have Haff disease, report your symptoms and what fish you ate to your health care provider right away. If possible, save meal remnants. If you have eaten the fish, but are not feeling ill, watch for symptoms.

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