NHF Attacks Methylmercury Levels in Swordfish at Codex Meeting in Utrecht

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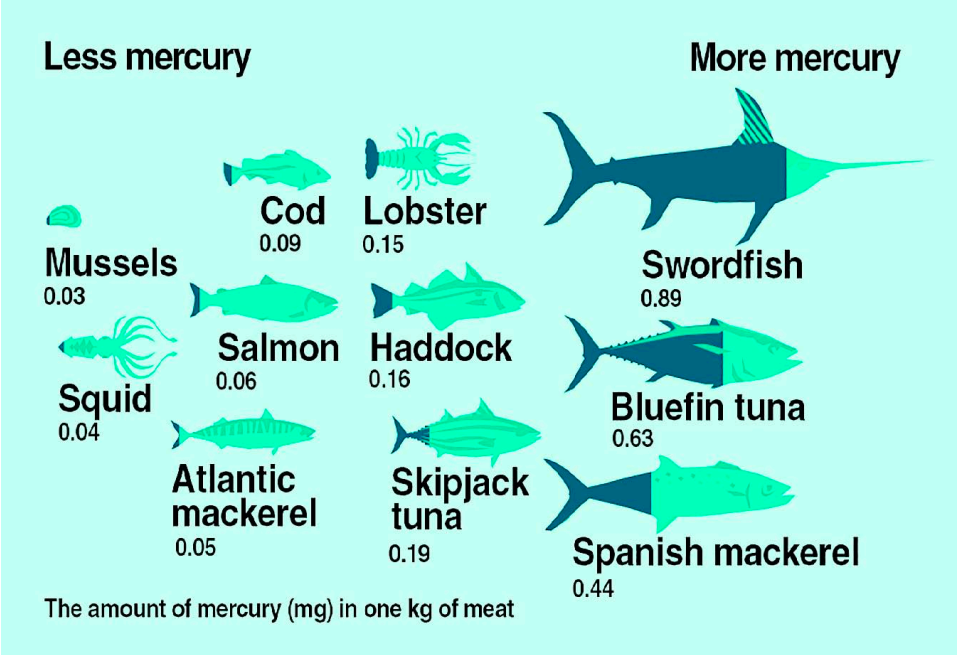

At the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods (CCCF) meeting in Utrecht, the Netherlands, held from March 12th through 16th, 2018, the Committee discussed, among other things, acceptable methylmercury levels in fish. There, I was fortunate to be representing the National Health Federation (NHF) and its members during the Codex discussions.

As many already know, Methylmercury is a powerful neurotoxin; and people exposed to high levels may experience adverse health effects. **Combined with ethylmercury in vaccines, this toxic double-hit may result in enhanced neurotoxic effects in developing mammals.**[1]

The possible symptoms of methylmercury poisoning may include:

- loss of peripheral vision,
- "pins and needles" feelings, usually in the hands, feet, and around the mouth,
- lack of coordination of movements,
- impairment of speech, hearing, and/or walking, and
- muscle weakness

The effects of methylmercury on infants and children can be devastating. Infants in the womb can be exposed to methylmercury when their mothers eat fish and shellfish that contain methylmercury. This exposure can adversely affect the unborn infants' growing brains and nervous systems. They are

more vulnerable to the toxic effects methylmercury than are adults. Children exposed to methylmercury while they are in the womb can have impacts to their:

- cognitive thinking,
- memory,
- attention,
- language,
- fine motor skills, and
- visual spatial skills.

NHF spoke out twice against the high maximum levels (2.4 mg/kg) of acceptable methylmercury that this Codex Committee was going to adopt. Among other things, I argued that the low to non-existent selenium levels in Swordfish made it especially dangerous for consumers to eat, especially at these proposed methylmercury levels, the highest of all of the fish being considered.[2]

Turning the Issue Around

The chairwoman, Ms. Wieke Tas, was all set to fix the acceptable levels at the highest level for any fish on the Codex list, even though the European Union and Russian delegates had expressed their reservations. Then, Norway, Tunisia, and Switzerland joined the EU and Russia, as did NHF. Still, the chairwoman was inclined to declare that there was "consensus" amongst the delegates and to set the high acceptable level. It was then that Cuba, Korea, and Ecuador joined with the objectors. But the Netherlands and Brazil countered that if the acceptable levels were lowered, then the rejection rate for swordfish would be 50%, while the chairwoman said that we risked having no maximum level if we could not agree on this level.

At this critical moment, I spoke up again for NHF and challenged the "50% rejection rate" argument, questioning why we should be allowed to eat a poison that would cause ill-health, even death, for many simply to avoid rejection of poisoned fish! This Committee is supposed to be protecting consumer health, not protecting rejection rates. Also, I argued that it would be better to have no maximum level than to have a level that was false and misleading. Finally, NHF argued that there could be no consensus where there were so many objecting to the current level.

Realizing that there was substantial opposition, the Chairwoman declared there was no consensus and that no level would be set. Fortunately, this chairwoman – unlike the chairwoman of the Codex Nutrition committee – has been good about calling upon NHF to speak, which was four times during the first meeting day and then twice again the following day.

"The last time I heard the slogan for Codex Alimentarius it was "Safe, Good Food for Everyone." Since when did they change that to "Good Rejection Rates for Industry"? **[Ben: Please put this red copy in a set-out box]**

The Minamata Convention on Mercury

On a side note, Angelika Tritscher of the World Health Organization (WHO) reminded the delegates of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, signed in July 2017. This Convention is a global treaty to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury.

The Minamata Convention took effect on August 16, 2017, and includes, among its major highlights, "a ban on new mercury mines, the phase-out of existing ones, the phase-out and phase-down of mercury use in a number of products and processes, control measures on emissions to air and on releases to land and water, and the regulation of the informal sector of artisanal and small-scale gold mining. The Convention also addresses interim storage of mercury and its disposal once it becomes waste, sites contaminated by mercury as well as health issues."[3]

The Bottom Line

Mercury levels in food and drink are a true health issue that needs to be addressed both locally and globally, particularly when exacerbated with vaccination use in humans and food-production animals. Fortunately, Codex has focused upon and is taking action. Still, many at Codex do not realize that mercury toxicity comes not just from the amount of mercury in fish but from whether or not protective nutrients such as selenium are present in the diet at the same time.

Also, some misguided Codex delegates were actually more concerned about the rejection rates for fish rather than the ill-health effects upon the people eating the fish! At this last Codex meeting, NHF did much both to educate other delegates about the protective properties of selenium as well as to squash any talk that fish rejection rates are more important than consumers' health.[4] Above all, NHF helped keep a very unhealthy mercury level for swordfish from being set.

[1] *See, e.g.*, Dórea JG, Farina M, Rocha JB, "Toxicity of ethylmercury (and Thimerosal): a comparison with methylmercury," *J Appl Toxicol*, 2013 Aug;33(8):700-11. doi: 10.1002/jat.2855. Epub 2013 Feb 11, at

[2] For a layman's alternative overview on this issue, see: https://chriskresser.com/5-reasons-why-concerns-about-mercury-in-fish-are-misguided/.

[3] *See* http://www.mercuryconvention.org/Convention.

[4] To a certain extent, adequate levels of selenium in fish will negate the ill-effects of mercury in the same fish. However, there are many fish species (such as Swordfish) having low levels of selenium.