



Good Sanitary Practices While Fishing and Handling Fish

Microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites are in all waters, and can be found on fish and crabs. These microorganisms may come from combined sewer overflows (CSOs*), faulty septic systems, and animal waste. After heavy rains, levels of fecal contamination can be higher in waters. Assume that all waters can have fecal contamination even if you can't see it.



Take the following precautions to avoid contact with microorganisms which can make you sick:

Fishing

- If you see raw sewage, avoid fishing. Follow advice on any sewage-related signs.
- Keep your hands away from your mouth, eyes, ears, and nose while fishing and cover open wounds to avoid contact with the water. This reduces the chances of getting sick from microorganisms that can enter your body through these pathways.
- Wash your hands after fishing, especially before eating, and shower if you have had contact with the water.



Photo by James Nova

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*For more information about CSOs visit the NYS DEC website www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/48595.html.

Handling and Preparing Fish



Fish and crabs, even from waters with high levels of microorganisms, can be eaten if you follow these good hygiene practices:

- Only keep fish that act and look healthy.
- Wear nitrile, rubber or plastic protective gloves while gutting, filleting, and skinning the fish. Avoid directly handling and preparing fish when you have cuts or open sores on your hands.
- Remove and discard the guts (internal organs) soon after harvest, and avoid direct contact with the intestinal contents.
- Keep fish cool (with ice or refrigerated below 45°F or 7°C) until filleted and then refrigerate or freeze.
- Wash hands, utensils, and work surfaces before and after handling any raw food, including fish.
- Unlike PCBs, mercury and other chemicals, most microorganisms can be destroyed by cooking. Cook fish thoroughly until internal temperature is 145°F or until flesh is pearly and opaque and separates easily with a fork.



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