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Seafood and tobacco blamed for being responsible for the high level of metal contamination of pregnant women in France

Volume 2 of the perinatal component of the French Human Biomonitoring (HBM) program, conducted by [Santé publique France](http://santepubliquefrance.fr), reports an alarming level of metal contamination of pregnant women. This is the result of a study on more than 4000 pregnant women in France.

Apart from uranium, all measured contaminants - aluminium, antimony, total arsenic, cadmium, cesium, chromium, cobalt, tin, mercury, nickel, lead and vanadium - were present in the biological samples (urine, blood, hair, saliva, maternal milk, etc.) made on the analysed pregnant women:

- « *Lead and mercury were measured at lower levels than in the past for France* » which may probably be a consequence of the limitation of discharge and the ban on leaded petrol, in particular;
- « *Compared to other countries, pregnant women in France are more contaminated with lead and arsenic. This could in part be explained by differences in behaviour* », particularly by the high level of consumption of seafood, root vegetables, tap water and bottled water;
- « *Levels of contamination observed for other metals are comparable with what had been observed in earlier studies.* »



It is important to note that the study shows that « *the majority of studied pollutants are present in all the pregnant women analysed...The rules and standards as well as lifestyle have an impact on the level of contamination... Not surprisingly, food is the main source of contamination.* »

The quality of seafood is once more blamed by the results of the study. This follows the fear created by the presence in those products of the *Listeria monocytogenes* bacteria which is responsible for listeriosis, a disease that may have serious consequences for pregnant women and newborn babies, as well as for persons whose immune system is weak. This presence had lead the French Ministry of Health to discourage the consumption of raw seafood as early as in 2015.

In 2016, [ANSES](#), the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety, recommended for pregnant women and children less than 30 months old to consume seafood most contaminated by mercury (sharks, swordfish, marlins...) and of seafood fished in the Mediterranean Sea in the area affected by pollution coming from the mining of bauxite by Alteo, near Gardanne. [\[read in French\]](#).

The national nutrition programme advises now to limit to twice a week the consumption of fish, and to ensure alternating the consumption of big and small fish. It is important to know that the majority of consumed fish are carnivorous animals that are on top of the food chain and that tend consequently to accumulate contaminants in their body.

It is likely that with the expected increase of sea pollution, if strong protection measures are not taken, the presence of such dangerous elements, as well as of plastic material, in seafood is likely to further increase in the future.

In the meantime, think about it twice before deciding on what you will eat during the forthcoming holiday season!

To know more :

- D. Carrington, [Women of childbearing age around world suffering toxic levels of mercury](#), 2017
- Santé publique France, « [Exposition des femmes enceintes aux métaux et métalloïdes](#) » Publication du tome 2 du volet périnatal de biosurveillance, communiqué de presse, 2017 (in French)
- Dereumeaux C *et al.*, [Imprégnation des femmes enceintes par les polluants de l'environnement en France en 2011 - Tome 2 : métaux et métalloïdes](#), Santé publique France, 2017 (in French)
- CIPADH, ["Boues Rouges" scandal: polluting the Mediterranean Sea](#), 2016
- O. Oksman, [Fish for dinner? Your seafood might come with a side of plastic](#), 2016
- L. Järup, [Hazards of heavy metal contamination](#), British Medical Bulletin, Volume 68, Issue 1, 1 December 2003, Pages 167–182

Earlier articles on hungerexplained.org related to the topic:

- [Food-Health nexus: priority to public interest, independent research and reshaped power balance are indispensable ingredients for reengineering our food systems and make them healthier](#), 2017
- [Food, Environment and Health](#), 2014/2017.