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## **NEW JERSEY: SEAFOOD AND SAFETY**

### *Public chows down on fish despite concerns over toxins*

About 3-in-4 New Jerseyans regularly enjoy a seafood meal, although 6-in-10 express concern that the fish they eat may contain unhealthy chemicals. The latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* found that shrimp and salmon top the list of Garden State seafood favorites.

According to the survey, 42% of New Jersey adults report eating fish, shellfish, or seafood at least once a week and another 32% say they do this about once or twice a month. Another 14% eat fish on occasion and 11% say they never eat seafood. Older residents age 50 and over (51%) are more likely than adults age 18 to 49 (37%) to eat fish on a weekly basis. Interestingly, there are no differences in the frequency of fish consumption for New Jerseyans living in a coastal or bay county (43% weekly) or inland (also 43% weekly).

About two-thirds (65%) of those surveyed reported eating at least one seafood meal in the week before the survey was conducted. Of this group, more people cooked their fish meals at home (69%) than ate out at a restaurant (39%). Seafood devotees who earn less than \$50,000 per year were the most likely to have their meal at home (78%).

The survey also found that most New Jersey fish consumers chose fresh (60%) over frozen (30%) or canned (10%) seafood when choosing the fish they eat. Five percent also report that some of the fish they ate was freshly caught by someone they knew.

Based on the recent meals reported in the survey, New Jerseyans are most likely to eat shrimp (32%) and salmon (24%). Other frequent choices are tilapia (14%), tuna (12%), crab (11%), and flounder (11%). Whitefish or shad (5%), scallops (5%), clams (5%), lobster (4%),

cod (3%), sea bass (3%), catfish (3%), bluefish (2%), and haddock (2%) were also eaten by New Jerseyans in the prior week. [*Note: the survey was conducted in late April 2009. There may be seasonal variations in seafood choices.*]

More frequent fish consumers – those who eat fish at least once a week – were as likely to choose shrimp (29%) as salmon (29%) for their meal. Less frequent fish eaters were more prone to eat shrimp (37%) than salmon (15%). Similarly, shrimp (43%) was by far the most popular restaurant selection, while shrimp (29%) and salmon (28%) shared the top spot for home preparation.

**– Concerns about fish safety –**

More than 6-in-10 New Jerseyans say they have heard either a lot (25%) or a little (39%) about certain types of fish containing unhealthy chemicals. Another 37% say they have heard nothing at all. Among weekly fish consumers, 32% have heard a lot and 39% have heard a little about this. Awareness is lower among monthly consumers (19% a lot and 42% a little) and occasional consumers (12% a lot and 35% a little). Interestingly, awareness of potential toxins in fish is lower for those who eat seafood on an occasional basis than it is for those who *never* eat fish (27% have heard a lot and 36% a little).

Overall, about 6-in-10 seafood consumers express some concern that the fish they eat may contain unhealthy chemicals – although only 31% say they are very concerned about this. Another 31% are somewhat concerned. The remainder report being either not too (20%) or not at all (16%) concerned about potential toxins in the fish they eat. Nearly 2-in-3 weekly (66%) and monthly (63%) fish consumers are concerned about chemicals in fish, compared to less than half (46%) of those who eat fish less often.

The survey also found that awareness and concerns about chemicals in fish do not necessarily translate into different choices for consumers. Some organizations, including the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the independent Environmental Defense Fund, issue guidelines for limiting consumption of certain fish species that may contain high levels of mercury and PCBs. Fish that are most likely to top these warning lists include farmed salmon, bluefish, shad, swordfish, catfish, and certain types of tuna. Fish that tend to be considered the safest to eat include most shellfish (including shrimp), wild salmon, tilapia, and cod.

The survey found that fish from both sets of lists appear on New Jerseyans' dinner plates. Moreover, there is no evidence that consumers who are either more aware or more concerned

about toxins in the fish they eat are more likely to choose fish lower in these chemicals. For example, consumers who said they were more aware and concerned about chemicals in seafood were slightly less likely to choose tilapia (11% to 18%) and about as likely to choose shrimp (27% to 30%) for their seafood meal, while they were actually more likely than others to choose salmon (42% compared to 27% for less concerned consumers).

“New Jersey seafood lovers express some concern about toxins in fish, but there seems to be a lot of confusion about which fish are more safe to eat than others,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* was conducted by telephone with 803 New Jersey adults from April 23 to 27, 2009. This sample has a margin of error of  $\pm 3.5$  percent. The poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute and originally published by the Gannett New Jersey newspaper group (Asbury Park Press, Courier-Post, Courier News, Daily Journal, Daily Record, and Home News Tribune).

## DATA TABLES

*The questions referred to in this release are as follows:*

*(\* Some columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.)*

1. How often do you personally eat fish, shellfish or seafood – at least once a week, about once or twice a month, less often, or never?
2. Have you eaten any fish, shellfish or seafood in the past week?

	TOTAL	AGE		INCOME			REGION	
		18 to 49	50 and over	<\$50K	\$50K to \$100K	>\$100K	Coast	Inland
<i>Ate Fish Past Week</i>	<b>65%</b>	62%	71%	59%	68%	70%	69%	65%
<i>Usually eat fish:</i>								
At least once a week	<b>42%</b>	37%	51%	40%	40%	47%	43%	43%
About once or twice a month	<b>32%</b>	34%	28%	30%	34%	35%	33%	32%
Less often	<b>14%</b>	15%	13%	15%	17%	9%	14%	14%
Never	<b>11%</b>	13%	8%	15%	9%	9%	10%	12%
<i>Unweighted n</i>	<b>803</b>	471	327	237	261	203	164	626

[QUESTION 3 WAS ASKED ONLY OF THOSE WHO ATE FISH IN PAST WEEK:]

3. What type of fish did you eat? [Note: columns do not add to 100% because multiple responses were accepted]

	TOTAL	CONSUMPTION		ATE IN RESTAURANT	ATE AT HOME	BOUGHT FRESH	BOUGHT FROZEN	AGE		INCOME			REGION	
		Weekly	Less often					18 to 49	50 and over	<\$50K	\$50K to \$100K	>\$100K	Coast	Inland
Shrimp	32%	29%	37%	43%	29%	32%	36%	32%	32%	29%	33%	34%	34%	32%
Salmon	24%	29%	15%	17%	28%	35%	19%	26%	21%	25%	22%	25%	21%	25%
Tilapia	14%	16%	9%	13%	15%	13%	22%	15%	11%	11%	15%	16%	14%	13%
Tuna	12%	12%	11%	14%	12%	8%	6%	12%	11%	10%	12%	13%	11%	12%
Crab	11%	13%	8%	15%	10%	10%	8%	13%	9%	11%	13%	8%	13%	11%
Flounder/Fluke	11%	13%	8%	8%	14%	13%	14%	7%	17%	12%	10%	8%	14%	10%
Whitefish/Shad	5%	4%	6%	4%	5%	4%	9%	7%	2%	9%	3%	2%	3%	5%
Scallops	5%	5%	4%	8%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	2%	9%	5%	7%	5%
Clams	5%	4%	8%	9%	4%	5%	3%	6%	5%	4%	8%	5%	10%	4%
Lobster	4%	4%	4%	7%	4%	5%	3%	4%	4%	3%	7%	4%	5%	4%
Cod	3%	4%	3%	3%	4%	4%	2%	2%	5%	2%	5%	1%	4%	3%
Sea Bass	3%	4%	1%	3%	3%	2%	1%	3%	5%	2%	5%	4%	3%	3%
Catfish	3%	2%	5%	3%	3%	5%	3%	4%	2%	4%	4%	0%	1%	3%
Bluefish	2%	2%	1%	0%	2%	4%	0%	1%	3%	5%	0%	1%	3%	1%
Haddock	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Swordfish	1%	2%	0%	2%	2%	3%	0%	2%	1%	0%	3%	1%	0%	2%
Trout	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%	1%	0%	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%	2%
Sole	1%	1%	0%	0%	2%	1%	2%	0%	2%	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%
Halibut	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Snapper	1%	0%	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	3%	2%	0%	2%	0%	1%
Porgy	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Mahi Mahi	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	0%
Mussels	1%	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Squid, eel	1%	0%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	3%	1%	0%	2%
Sardine/Anchovy	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	3%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Fishsticks/cake	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%
No answer	3%	2%	3%	0%	3%	3%	4%	2%	2%	4%	1%	3%	0%	3%
Unweighted n	480	322	158	187	335	204	103	257	219	121	164	130	103	372

[QUESTION 4 WAS ASKED ONLY OF THOSE WHO ATE FISH IN PAST WEEK:]

4. Was this in a restaurant or at home?

	TOTAL	CONSUMPTION		AGE			INCOME		REGION	
		Weekly	Less often	18 to 49	50 and over	<\$50K	\$50K to \$100K	>\$100K	Coast	Inland
Restaurant	30%	26%	36%	32%	26%	22%	32%	41%	30%	29%
Home	60%	63%	53%	59%	62%	73%	52%	50%	60%	60%
Both	9%	9%	9%	8%	10%	5%	14%	7%	9%	9%
Other	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	2%
Unweighted n	480	322	158	257	219	121	164	130	103	372

[QUESTION 5 WAS ASKED ONLY OF THOSE WHO ATE FISH AT HOME:]

5. Was this fish purchased fresh, frozen, or canned, or was it caught by someone you know? [Note: columns do not add to 100% because multiple responses were accepted]

	TOTAL	CONSUMPTION		ATE IN RESTAURANT	ATE AT HOME	AGE		INCOME			REGION	
		Weekly	Less often			18 to 49	50 and over	<\$50K	\$50K to \$100K	>\$100K	Coast	Inland
Fresh	60%	64%	52%	70%	60%	57%	66%	59%	67%	59%	58%	61%
Frozen	30%	29%	33%	20%	31%	30%	30%	31%	24%	33%	28%	31%
Canned	10%	7%	16%	10%	10%	11%	9%	14%	9%	7%	10%	10%
Caught by someone I know	5%	5%	6%	8%	5%	7%	3%	4%	7%	4%	6%	5%
Unweighted n	339	243	96	46	335	179	157	96	115	77	68	268

**[QUESTION 6 WAS ASKED OF EVERYONE:]**

6. Have you read or heard anything about certain types of fish containing unhealthy chemicals? [If "Yes": Have you heard a lot or just a little?]

	TOTAL	CONSUMPTION				ATE IN RESTAU-RANT	ATE AT HOME	BOUGHT FRESH	BOUGHT FROZEN	AGE		REGION	
		Weekly	Monthly	Less often	Never					18 to 49	50 and over	Coast	Inland
Yes, a lot	<b>25%</b>	32%	19%	12%	27%	32%	33%	32%	31%	21%	30%	20%	26%
Yes, a little	<b>39%</b>	39%	42%	35%	36%	41%	39%	39%	35%	39%	39%	42%	37%
Nothing at all	<b>37%</b>	29%	39%	54%	37%	27%	29%	30%	34%	40%	31%	37%	37%
Unweighted n	<b>803</b>	350	259	110	84	187	335	204	103	471	327	164	626

**[QUESTION 7 WAS ASKED OF THOSE WHO EAT FISH AT LEAST OCCASIONALLY:]**

7. How concerned are you that the fish you eat may contain unhealthy chemicals – very, somewhat, not too, or not at all concerned?

	TOTAL	CONSUMPTION				ATE IN RESTAU-RANT	ATE AT HOME	BOUGHT FRESH	BOUGHT FROZEN	AGE		REGION		HEARD OF UNHEALTHY FISH		
		Weekly	Monthly	Less often						18 to 49	50 and over	Coast	Inland	Lot	Little	Nothing
Very	<b>31%</b>	34%	28%	26%	28%	35%	39%	30%	31%	30%	24%	33%	39%	21%	35%	
Somewhat	<b>31%</b>	32%	35%	20%	32%	32%	28%	44%	30%	33%	34%	31%	35%	33%	27%	
Not too	<b>20%</b>	19%	22%	19%	21%	17%	16%	17%	21%	18%	26%	18%	9%	29%	18%	
Not at all	<b>16%</b>	14%	13%	29%	17%	14%	16%	8%	15%	17%	14%	16%	17%	14%	17%	
Don't Know	<b>2%</b>	2%	1%	5%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%	2%	0%	3%	3%	
Unweighted n	<b>719</b>	350	259	110	187	335	204	103	411	304	152	556	195	306	218	

The Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll was conducted and analyzed by the Monmouth University Polling Institute research staff. The telephone interviews were collected by Braun Research on April 23-27, 2009 with a statewide random sample of 803 adult residents. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported by gender or party identification, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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