



June 30, 2023
For Immediate Release

Oil contaminants found in eggs and char

The Nunatsiavut Government (NG) is advising residents of elevated levels of oil compounds found in eggs and arctic char in the Postville and Nain areas.

After a diesel spill of 3,000 litres in Kaikopok Bay near Postville in 2020, NG, in collaboration with Environment and Climate Change Canada, began testing for oil contaminants to determine any long-term, lasting impacts. Results of the analyses showed elevated levels of oil compounds in Postville compared to Nain, and elevated levels in both communities for 2021. This resulted in a harvesting advisory and a request to Health Canada for a review of the potential health implications.

While the levels observed did not raise concern of acute effects (short-term harm), some of the compounds detected and their levels may lead to increased risk of cancer over the long term if consumed in excessive quantities. In order to reduce risk, Health Canada estimated Maximum Monthly Intake (MMI) for eggs of three species – Great Black Back Gull (sadler), Common Eider (duck) and Black Guillemots (pigeon) – for both Nain and Postville. These MMIs are based on long-term consumption at these levels over a whole lifetime, and a risk of cancer of less than one in 100,000. These MMIs are detailed below, along with information on how to interpret them and use them in your own harvesting and consumption decisions.

While these results are currently only available for Postville and Nain, residents in other Labrador Inuit communities should exercise caution until community-specific data is gathered, which is currently under way. Using the MMIs calculated for the community closest to your harvesting sites is likely the safest option.

Following concerns expressed by Postville residents last year, samples of char were also analyzed to verify if more testing should be conducted for this species. Elevated levels of diesel-related compounds have been detected in char samples in Postville when compared to Nain. These results are still being investigated for relevance in terms of human health, but currently are not raising the same concerns as the egg results.

Collections of pigeon eggs and arctic char are planned in all Labrador Inuit communities this summer, along with salmon in Postville and Rigolet, and sediments and mussels in Postville and Nain. Results for the eggs collected in 2022 are expected in the coming weeks. NG has also begun the development of its own community-centered spill response strategy.

While NG’s monitoring efforts were focused around the 2020 Kaikopok Bay spill, the contamination detected cannot be linked to a specific event and may have a different or multiple sources. Updated results and advice will be provided as it becomes available.

Maximum Monthly Intake estimated by Health Canada, based on the 2021 eggs

Recommendation for Postville

Sadler (Great Black Backed Gull)		Duck (Common Eider)		Pigeon (Black Guillemot)	
Children 1-4yo	Adults 18+	Children 1-4yo	Adults 18+	Children 1-4yo	Adults 18+
1.5 eggs/month	8 eggs/month	7 eggs/month	33 eggs/month	0.1 eggs/month*	0.5 eggs/month*

*These recommendations are based on lifetime average amounts. Where values are less than one egg, consider smaller serving sizes and/or less frequent meals of these types of eggs (e.g. 1 egg every 2 months for adults.)

Recommendations for Nain

Sadler (Great Black Backed Gull)		Duck (Common Eider)		Pigeon (Black Guillemot)	
Children 1-4yo	Adults 18+	Children 1-4yo	Adults 18+	Children 1-4yo	Adults 18+
7 eggs/month	32 eggs/month	6 eggs/month	29 eggs/month	2 eggs/month	10 eggs/month

What is the idea behind the Maximum Monthly Intakes?

The MMI values are conservative estimates and represent what level would *not* lead to an increase of more than 1 in 100,000 chances of cancer if eaten every month during a whole lifetime (e.g. 70 years).

What if I eat eggs from more than one species?

The number of eggs of all species needs to be added up to calculate your monthly intake, considering each species MMIs. For example, someone in Postville that ate half the limit in sadler eggs (4 of 8 eggs) and half the limit in duck eggs (16 of 33) is at the Maximum Monthly Intake.

What if I already ate more than the MMIs this year, or last year?

The MMIs are calculated based on a lifetime of exposure, and do not indicate that a single event of overconsumption will lead to negative impacts. Occasionally, consuming slightly more than the estimated MMI would be considered a low health risk and not likely to be of concern. Furthermore, it is important to consider that traditional foods have significant health benefits, and that restricting consumption can also have negative consequences.

The MMI in Postville is below one egg a month. Does that mean pigeon eggs are not safe to eat?

No. However, remember that all species count toward the same MMI, and that somebody that would want to eat eggs of all three species would have to match consumption so the total stays safe. For example, eating a third of each species’ MMI.

Why are the MMIs based on the 2021 data?

2021 was the most recent year for which data was submit to Health Canada. There was a significant variation between 2020 and 2021, therefore it made sense to base recommendations on the more recent elevated results. However, it should be noted that the more recent 2021 data is based on limited samples and that the Postville results for sadler and pigeon eggs varied considerably across individual samples. When analyses are completed and results available for 2022 (and eventually 2023), the Nunatsiavut Government will work quickly with health authorities to evaluate whether the risk is going down, up, or staying the same. These results will determine a way forward.

Residents of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims requiring more information, please contact:

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