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For Immediate Release

Diminishing risks related to oil-contamination found in bird eggs in 2022: Health Canada

The Nunatsiavut Department of Lands and Natural Resources is pleased to advise that an updated health risk opinion by Health Canada on the consumption of seabird eggs and levels of oil-related contaminants shows lower health risks in eggs collected in 2022, especially in Postville, as compared to previous years.

Results showing an overall lower amount of oil-related contaminants in 2022, in both Nain and Postville, had already been shared in a public release and during community meetings last summer. However, this health risk opinion was necessary to confirm the actual significance of these reduced levels in terms of egg consumption. The new estimated maximum monthly intakes provided with this health risk opinion can be found in the tables below.

Following a diesel spill of 3,000 litres in Kaikopok Bay near Postville in 2020, the Nunatsiavut Government, 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, the result of which were shared in July 2023.

The Nunatsiavut Government is continuing its efforts to understand the impacts of the diesel spill in Kaikopok Bay, as well as to get a better understanding of oil-contaminants in Nunatsiavut in general. Sampling efforts in 2023 included the expansion of seabird eggs and arctic char collections to all communities and the beginning of collections for salmon, mussels, sediments and water. Significant results will be made available as they are obtained.

For more information, please contact:

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Maximum Monthly Intake estimated by Health Canada, based on the 2022 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+
243 eggs/month	1135 eggs/month	15 eggs/month	69 eggs/month	545 eggs/month*	2544 eggs/month

*These recommendations are based on lifetime average amounts.

Recommendations for Nain

Pigeon (Black Guillemot)		Pigeon (Black Guillemot)		Pigeon (Black Guillemot)	
Children 1-4yo	Adults 18+	Children 1-4yo	Adults 18+	Children 1-4yo	Adults 18+
17 eggs/month	79 eggs/month	11 eggs/month	50 eggs/month	17 eggs/month	79 eggs/month

What is the idea behind the MMIs?

The Maximum Monthly Intake (MMI) values are conservative estimates and represent what level of consumption would not lead to an elevated risk of cancer, if consumed over a whole lifetime. It is a level that would not lead to an increase of more than 1 in 100,000 chances of cancer if eaten every month your whole life (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 instance, if a toddler in Nain consumes half the MMI for sadler eggs and half the MMI for duck eggs, they would be at their 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.

Why are the MMIs based on the 2022 data?

2022 was the most recent year for which we data was available to submit to Health Canada. When analyses are completed and results available for 2023, the Nunatsiavut Government will work quickly with health authorities to evaluate the situation and communicate updated results.