

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers regarding the “Do Not Eat” deer advisory in Fairfield, Maine (*printable map attached*)

(Updated November 2021)

What is the “Do Not Eat” advisory?

On November 23, 2021, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) and the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (MECDC) issued a “Do Not Eat” advisory for deer taken in the greater Fairfield area. A “Do Not Eat” advisory is a recommendation to not eat game harvested within a specified area issued in response to a possible health concern.

Why was the advisory issued?

The “Do Not Eat” advisory was issued due to high levels of the chemical PFOS (perfluorooctane sulfonic acid) found in five of eight deer collected near Ohio Hill Road close to fields known to have high PFOS soil levels and high PFOS surface water levels. In deer from the Ohio Hill area, PFOS levels in meat were approximately 40 parts per billion. PFOS levels were similar in a fawn, yearling, and adult animal. These levels of PFOS in meat are high enough to warrant a recommendation to eat less than 2 to 3 meals per year.

PFOS levels were much lower in three other adult deer collected in different areas of Fairfield close to fields known to have PFOS in soil. Levels in these three deer were still high enough to recommend limits on eating meat. Out of an abundance of caution and because we currently only have test results on eight deer, the decision was made to extend a “Do Not Eat” advisory to all of the Fairfield area until additional sampling of deer for PFOS contamination is possible.

What are PFOS and PFAS?

PFAS are human-made chemicals that are resistant to heat, water, and oil. PFOS is one type of PFAS. For decades, PFAS have been used in industrial applications and consumer products such as carpeting, waterproof clothing, upholstery, food wrappings, personal care products, fire-fighting foams, and metal plating. PFAS have been found at low levels both in the environment and in the blood of the majority of the U.S. population. High levels have been found in some farm fields in Fairfield with a history of land application of biosolids. High levels have also been found in well water near these fields and in some surface waters located on or near these fields.

PFAS do not easily break down in the environment and can persist in soils for a very long time. They can also build up over time in the blood and organs of wild game, fish, farm animals, and humans that are exposed to these chemicals through the food they eat and the water they drink. Studies of people who were exposed to PFAS have found links between the amount of chemicals in blood and increased cholesterol levels, decreased response to vaccines, increased liver enzymes, increased risk of high blood pressure or pre-eclampsia in pregnant women, and increased risk of kidney or testicular cancer.

Where is the area from which we should avoid eating deer? (click here for a map)

The Fairfield “Do Not Eat” advisory area begins at the Carter Memorial Bridge in Waterville where Route 137 crosses the Kennebec, heads north up the Kennebec River past Waterville and Skowhegan, to the Eugene Cole Bridge in Norridgewock (Route 8 and 201A), then south from Norridgewock along Route 8 into Smithfield to the intersection of Routes 8 and 137, then south on Route 137 until it crosses the Kennebec River on the Carter Memorial Bridge. Click here for a map of the advisory area.

Why such a large advisory area?

Deer with high PFOS levels were taken on Ohio Hill Road close to fields with high PFOS soil levels and some surface waters with high PFOS levels. Deer usually travel about one to one and a half miles but may travel farther in some circumstances. A MDIFW deer study showed that collared deer may travel up to five miles for seasonal migration. The “Do Not Eat” advisory extends to about five miles around the Ohio Hill Road area following easily recognizable roads and landscape features to provide an extra measure of protection for hunters and their families. The Kennebec River is a significant barrier to daily deer movements, so the advisory does not currently extend east of the river.

What parts of the deer are safe for me to eat?

None. Do not eat any deer meat or organs taken from within the identified area for the “Do Not Eat” advisory.

Can't I just cook it to get rid of the PFOS or trim away the fat?

No. You cannot get rid of PFOS by cooking the meat or organs. PFOS is mostly in the meat rather than the fat.

How long will the “Do Not Eat” advisory be in place?

It is unknown how long the advisory will be in place. We don't have enough information on how deer are exposed to PFAS. Fields with a history of biosolids application still have high levels of PFAS in the soil and some surface waters many years after the last application.

Why did the state test deer in this area?

The MDIFW tested deer in Fairfield areas after consultation with MECDC and Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MEDEP). The initial collection of eight deer by MDIFW targeted areas known to have among the highest soil PFOS levels measured in Fairfield. Deer were collected in late October and test results only just became available to MDIFW and MECDC in late November.

Very little scientific information is available on PFAS in whitetail deer. The State of Michigan issued a similar “Do Not Eat” advisory in response to sampling deer near a marsh area contaminated with PFAS. The states of Wisconsin and New Hampshire issued “Do Not Eat” advisories for deer liver based on recent deer sampling.

What animals have been tested for PFAS?

To date, only deer and fish have been sampled for PFAS by the state for the purposes of determining if they are safe to eat. MDIFW will be developing a more expansive sampling plan over the coming weeks to further refine the advisory area.

What should I do with venison in my freezer from the PFAS “Do Not Eat” advisory area?

We recommend that you do not eat it because there is a possibility that it could have a high level of contamination.

If I want to throw my venison away, how should I do this?

Venison from the advisory area can be disposed of by depositing it in the trash or a landfill. Hunters with whole deer carcasses are asked to contact IFW at 207-287-8000 or IFW.PFAS@maine.gov. There are several options available for disposing your deer. We can help you choose what works for you.

How can I have venison tested? Can I take a deer to a check station to have it tested for PFAS?

PFAS testing is expensive and there are no laboratories in Maine that have this ability. There are a limited number of laboratories nationally that can test meat for PFAS. Some laboratories may not accept samples from private individuals. It can cost \$250 or more to test a single meat sample.

What if I’ve already eaten venison from this area?

Five out of the eight deer tested in Fairfield had high levels of PFOS in meat that warrant a “Do Not Eat” advisory. Three other deer collected in other parts of Fairfield had PFOS levels that would warrant an “Eat No More Than One Meal Per Week” advisory. If you or your family have eaten deer from the Fairfield area, it doesn’t mean the deer had high PFOS levels nor does it mean you or your family will become ill. Your risk of any health effects will depend on how much deer from this area you have eaten, and how many years you have harvested deer from this area.

I’ve eaten venison from this area. Should I have my blood tested?

Blood tests are available that can measure the amount of PFAS in blood at the time it is collected. Because these PFAS chemicals persist in your body for a long time, a blood test is a measure of your exposure of years. However, the test cannot tell you where the PFAS came from, or if the PFAS has or will cause health problems.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, most people in the United States have some amount of PFAS in their blood, especially PFOA and PFOS. There is no medical treatment to remove PFAS from blood.

If you have questions about your PFOS exposure from eating deer, blood testing to measure your exposure, or possible health effects, please contact one of our toxicologists at 866-292-3474 (toll-free in Maine), 207-287-4311, or Maine Relay 711.

If you're thinking about having your blood tested for PFAS, talk to your doctor. You may find the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's factsheet, "Talking to Your Doctor about Exposure to PFAS" helpful. It is available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/health-effects/talk-to-your-doctor.html>.

I harvested a deer from the "Do Not Eat" area. Can I get a replacement deer harvest tag, so I can take another deer?

If you have harvested a deer from the Advisory Area this year, contact IFW at 207-287-8000, you will be eligible to get an additional deer permit to take an extra deer in 2022.

What precautions should processors take in the event a deer has been contaminated by PFAS?

No special sanitation procedures are needed if a deer contaminated with PFAS comes into contact with a processing machine.

What about other parts of the state? Is it still safe to eat deer taken from places in the state?

At this time, there are no advisories against eating venison from any of the other Maine locations being investigated for PFAS contamination.

Can hunters help the state harvest deer for testing?

Not at this time. Any opportunities for hunters to provide samples for testing will be communicated prior to the fall 2022 hunting season.

Where can people hunt?

If hunters wish to avoid the "Do Not Eat" advisory area, we recommend checking out one of the many Wildlife Management Areas in central Maine:

<https://maine.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=8593eeef425b45fd9dc25967f985acc>

I still have questions, who can I contact?

Please contact MDIFW at 207-287-8000, or at IFW.PFAS@maine.gov. The MECDC can be contacted at 866-292-3474 (toll-free in Maine), 207-287-4311, or Maine Relay 711. You can contact Maine DEP at pfas.dep@maine.gov.

