

News Release

February 5, 2008

Flower Garden Fish Advisories Issued

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is telling commercial seafood processors not to accept certain kinds of fish from the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary area in the Northern Gulf due to ciguatera toxin.

The Texas Department of State Health Services is advising recreational fishermen and other consumers not to eat the fish. Cooking does not affect the toxin.

Several human cases of ciguatera fish poisoning (CFP) have been linked to eating certain fish from the area.

Fish species covered in the advisories are marbled, gag, scamp and yellowfin grouper; blackfin and dog snapper; and hogfish caught within 10 miles of the Flower Garden. Also included are yellow, horse-eye and black jack; king mackerel; amberjack; and barracuda from within 50 miles of the sanctuary.

The ciguatera toxin is produced by algae that grow on some coral. The Flower Garden is a coral reef system. The toxin accumulates in fish tissue along the natural food chain as smaller fish eat the algae and larger fish eat smaller fish.

Symptoms of CFP may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, numbness, tingling around the mouth, a prickly feeling in the skin, joint and muscle pain, headache, reversal of hot and cold sensations, increased sensitivity to temperature extremes, vertigo and muscular weakness. CFP also can cause irregular, slow or rapid heartbeat and lowered blood pressure.

Symptoms usually begin within a few hours of consumption and typically last several days, but some symptoms can last for months. CFP is rarely fatal.

The Flower Garden, a popular spot for commercial and recreational fishermen and scuba divers, is in U.S. territorial waters 120 miles southeast of Galveston.

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(News Media: For more information contact Doug McBride, DSHS Press Officer, 512-458-7524.)