

## **MDE Increases Outreach to Educate Sensitive Populations about Seafood Consumption**

Since the early 1980s, the Maryland Department of the Environment has been collecting data about contaminants in fish and crabs and providing consumption guidelines to the public based on that data. Baltimore Harbor is of particular concern because pollution levels are higher and the department has focused considerable energy on educating local fishermen.

Reaching the population most vulnerable to the effects of contaminants - women of child-bearing age and children - has always been a high priority of our education and outreach efforts. Consumption guidelines for the general population do not apply to mothers and young children because of the potential impact of contaminants on fetuses and infants. This year we have taken the effort to educate families to a new level.

We have developed a new brochure that provides information specific to women of child-bearing age and young children. To ensure that the brochure reaches its intended audience, we are working with health agencies to identify locations where mothers are likely to visit - including doctors' offices and clinics in areas where harbor-caught fish are most likely to be part of family diets.

Importantly, we have also convened an ad-hoc advisory group of local health experts, academics and community members to help MDE increase the effectiveness of our outreach. While the department brings considerable expertise to these health issues, there is no substitute for first-hand knowledge of the population that these informal advisors contribute. On their advice, we have already revised one brochure and are revamping the language in all our materials to make sure the message is easy to understand.

We are reaching these most sensitive audiences. Local health centers and Women Infants and Children (WIC) centers have asked MDE to resupply them with brochures. Community groups have asked us to develop a line of brochures in Spanish. Korean language materials are also on the way. The health of our citizens is paramount. We believe that the information we are providing is one small but important part of protecting people's health.

One other measure of success: MDE routinely incorporates material developed by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Now EPA is looking at MDE brochures as a possible model for combining local and state information.