

Med school releases Dayton mercury findings

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There is good news from the scientists who undertook a study of urine and blood mercury levels in the residents of Dayton, Nevada. The study, "Human Health Effects of Environmental Mercury," was undertaken by University of Nevada School of Medicine scientists, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta and the National Institutes of Health Carson River Superfund Project.

According to Sandra A. Daugherty, M.D., Ph.D., of the school's Department of Family and Community Medicine and the principal investigator of the study, preliminary analysis of the findings has been positive. "I believe these findings indicate that in spite of the highly increased levels of mercury found by other Superfund investigators in the Dayton environment (i.e. in the soil and water), there is no evidence in the human population that this has caused increased mercury concentration above the 20 parts per billion (ppb) alert level considered safe by the Nevada State Health Division and the CDC.

"In the Dayton sample of 400 people, there were no elevated mercury levels above 20ppb in either urine or blood in any individual tested," Dr. Daugherty said. -

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Although the average urine mercury levels found in the residents of the households located in central or downtown Dayton (those areas along the Carson River and along highway 50) was higher than those found in the residents of households located in the outlying areas of the community, the 'downtown' residents had levels well below the 20ppb cut-off.

She also explains that increased contact with the outside environment may contribute to higher levels of urine mercury in the children tested in the study. However, she stressed that "no abnormally elevated levels were detected in any of these children." However, the team will continue to monitor their mercury levels for the next two to three years.

Dr. Daugherty does add a cautionary note. In the study, she found that very few Dayton residents eat either fish or fowl caught or raised locally and, the few who do, consume them sparingly. She urged residents to continue to refrain from eating these fish and fowl, which have been found to have high levels of mercury in their tissues. This is a warning that has been given repeatedly by the Nevada State Health Division.