

After the Catch - Handling Fresh Fish

For many Ontarians, there are three seasons in a year: walleye, muskie and bass. Fish are an excellent source of high quality protein and are low in saturated fat which makes them a healthy food choice and an important part of a balanced diet. By following these guidelines you can ensure that you can safely enjoy your catch.



Bacteria are a major cause of food spoilage. Millions of bacteria live on the surface of the fish, on the gills, and in the gut of living fish. After harvest, the bacteria invade the flesh of the fish, and can grow and multiply, producing the "fishy" smell and taste associated with old seafood.

After the catch:

- Plan ahead and decide what you will do with the fish immediately after you catch them. Live fish can be kept on stringers or in live wells. Once killed, fish should be kept chilled on ice or in a refrigerator and cleaned as soon as possible. Cool fish quickly (to 4°C/40°F) to prevent bacterial growth.
- Wear disposable plastic gloves when handling fish for cleaning. Use clean, hot water and soap or alcohol swabs to clean the knife frequently between cuts to keep from dragging bacteria into the flesh of the fish. Wash your hands, knife, and cutting boards often in warm, soapy water. Rinse the filleted fish in cold, clean water.
- Wipe the fish surface clean with cloth or paper towels, wrap in plastic wrap and place it on ice (alternating layers of fish and ice) in a cooler for transport.
- Make sure the raw fish stays separate from cooked foods during handling and storage. Please ensure that the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' Recreational Fishing Regulation is complied with in regards to transporting sport fish.
- Fresh fish should be cooked to 70°C/158°F within 1-2 days. Alternatively, fresh fish may be frozen (-18°C/0°F) and used within six months.

NOTE: Some fish from Ontario waters have contaminants that can be harmful to humans. Scientific studies have shown that the developing fetus and young children are particularly sensitive to contaminants found in fish. If you consume sport fish, you should consult the Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish, produced by the Ministry of Environment and available at the Health Unit. The Guide contains up-to-date advice on consuming fish from more than 1700 locations in Ontario. This advice is especially important for children and pregnant women.