

ASSEMBLY, No. 2101

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

INTRODUCED JUNE 3, 1996

By Assemblywoman GILL

1 AN ACT concerning health warnings about mercury contamination and
2 supplementing Title 26 of the Revised Statutes.

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4 **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
5 of New Jersey:

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7 1. a. The Department of Health, in consultation with the
8 Department of Environmental Protection, shall prepare a consumer's
9 mercury alert notice for posting in all patient areas of professional
10 medical offices that provide gynecological, obstetrical or pediatric care
11 and in the patient or client areas of all maternal and child health and
12 nutrition programs. The notice shall explain the danger to women who
13 expect to become pregnant, women who are pregnant or breast
14 feeding their children, and young children, of eating mercury
15 contaminated fish. The notice shall summarize the State's and the
16 federal government's most current mercury health advisories
17 concerning fish consumption and shall contain such other information
18 as the department deems appropriate. The notice also shall list the
19 telephone number established pursuant to subsection b. of this section
20 that State residents may call for further information about the health
21 advisories.

22 The department shall distribute the notice, at no charge, to all
23 professional medical offices that provide gynecological, obstetrical or
24 pediatric care and to all publicly funded maternal and child health and
25 nutrition programs in the State. The department shall update the
26 notice as necessary, and shall make additional copies of the notice
27 available to health care providers upon request.

28 b. The Department of Health, in consultation with the Department
29 of Environmental Protection, shall establish and maintain a telephone
30 service to provide information to residents of the State about mercury
31 health advisories for the consumption of fresh water fish.

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33 2. This act shall take effect 60 days after enactment and shall
34 expire on December 31, 1998.

1 STATEMENT

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3 The purpose of this bill is to provide greater protection from the
4 health hazards of mercury contamination by providing residents of this
5 State who are at greatest risk of consuming fish that have elevated
6 levels of mercury, with necessary information about these fish.

7 The Department of Health, in consultation with the Department of
8 Environmental Protection, is required to prepare a consumer's mercury
9 alert notice for posting in all patient areas of professional medical
10 offices that provide gynecological, obstetrical or pediatric care and in
11 all patient or client areas of maternal and child health and nutrition
12 programs. The notice shall explain the danger to women who expect
13 to become pregnant, women who are pregnant or breast feeding their
14 children, and young children, of eating mercury contaminated fish.
15 The notice shall summarize the State's and the federal government's
16 most current health advisories concerning fish consumption.

17 The bill also requires the Department of Health, in consultation with
18 the Department of Environmental Protection, to establish and maintain
19 a telephone service to provide information to residents of the State
20 about mercury health advisories for the consumption of fresh water
21 fish. This telephone number shall be listed on the notices posted in
22 medical offices and maternal and child health and nutrition programs.

23 While mercury is widespread in the environment, the most likely
24 exposure for humans is by eating mercury contaminated fish. The
25 amount of mercury in fish depends upon the species of fish, where the
26 fish has lived and its size. Even though most fish are safe to eat,
27 people who eat large amounts of fish may accumulate significant
28 amounts of mercury over time.

29 This accumulation of mercury is a particular problem for women in
30 the months just prior to and during pregnancy because a developing
31 fetus is especially susceptible to the harmful effects of mercury.
32 Mercury affects fetal development by preventing the brain and nervous
33 system from developing normally. Affected children show lowered
34 intelligence, impaired hearing and poor coordination, and their verbal
35 and motor skills may be delayed.

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40 Provides for notification to pregnant women about mercury health
41 advisories in consumption of fish.