

HEALTH ADVISORY



March 25, 2021
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Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
1 Lower Navy Hill Road, Navy Hill, Saipan, MP 96950



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ciguatera Fish Poisoning (CFP) in the CNMI

The Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) prepares weekly surveillance reports on communicable diseases to share with community partners to prevent and control any emerging or re-emerging diseases that may pose a threat to the CNMI community.

According to recent surveillance, the CHCC is seeing an increase in Ciguatera Fish Poisoning (CFP) cases due to the consumption of various shallow to deep water bottom fish.

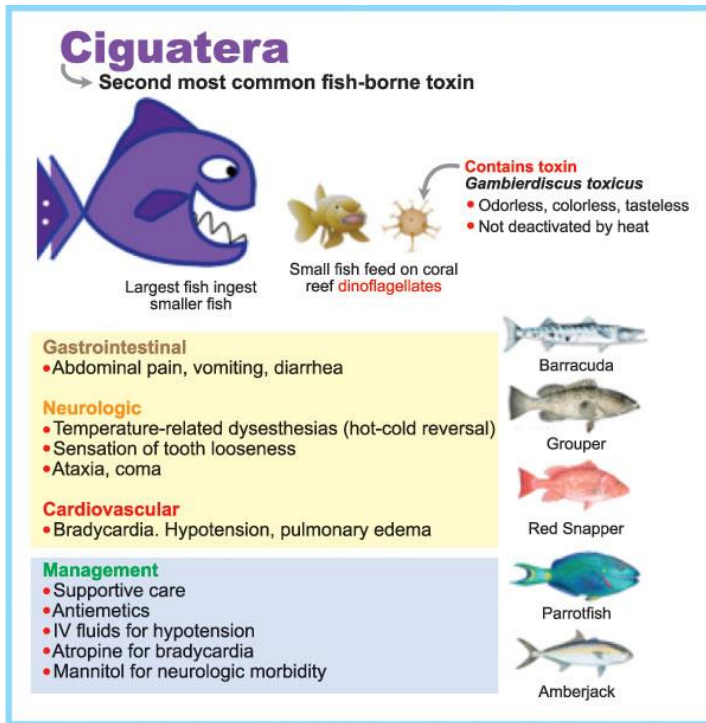
CFP is a common food-borne illness related to the consumption of certain species of fish that have been contaminated with plankton (algae) derived toxin associated with coral reefs. The ciguatera toxin is non-detectable as it does not harm the fish and is unrecognizable when consumed. Unlike other food-borne illnesses, CFP is not transferred from cross-contamination due to inadequate food handler hygiene, food preparation, cooking, handling, and storage. In addition, the ciguatera toxin can withstand cooking and freezing temperatures and is not preventable if the fish species already harbors the toxin.

Common symptoms of CFP are as follows:

- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle weakness, joint aches, headache, dizziness, tingling or numbness, itching, sometimes chills or sweating, dental pain, and low blood pressure.
- A characteristic symptom is "hot-cold reversal"; hot items feel cold and cold items feel hot.

Symptoms may appear within 15 minutes to 24 hours after consuming an infected fish. Most individuals who experience symptoms feel better in a few days to a week, but in some cases, symptoms have lasted for months and sometimes years.

Individuals experiencing symptoms of CFP are urged to seek medical attention as prompt treatment can reduce the severity of symptoms, especially those with underlying medical conditions. Individuals are also advised to immediately discard any remaining leftovers including broths.



Fish associated with CFP

More than 400 species of fish are associated with CFP. The most common are older, larger fish which have been eating contaminated fish during their life span, including (but are not restricted to): Barracuda, grouper, jack, hogfish, mackerel, snapper. There is no specific prevention except to eat fish smaller than about 4-6 pounds.

Prevention

You can take the following precautions to prevent ciguatera fish poisoning:

- Avoid or limit consumption of reef fish;
- Never eat high-risk fish such as barracuda or moray eel;
- Avoid eating the parts of the fish that concentrate ciguatera toxin: liver, intestines, roe, and head.

Ciguatera toxins do not affect the texture, taste, or smell of fish, nor are they destroyed by gastric acid, cooking, smoking, freezing, canning, salting, or pickling.

For more information visit: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2020/preparing-international-travelers/food-poisoning-from-marine-toxins>

For more information on food-borne illnesses, please contact the Environmental Health and Disease Prevention at 670-664-4870/2/3 or email john.tagabuel@dph.gov.mp

For more information about CHCC programs, please follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter at @cnmichcc, check out our website at www.chcc.gov.mp or call us at (670) 234-8950.

This health advisory may be found online at <http://www.chcc.gov.mp/pressrelease.html>