



Public Health Mōno-Gram



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Consumers Advised Not To Eat Puffer Fish Labeled as Monkfish

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SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) today advised consumers not to eat monkfish imported from China because the product may actually be puffer fish, a species that may contain a powerful toxin which can cause serious illness or death if consumed. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reported finding dangerous levels of tetrodotoxin in fish labeled as monkfish. In one instance, the product was labeled “Bok,” the Korean name for puffer fish. Two people in the Chicago area became ill after consuming homemade soup made from the fish. One person was hospitalized due to severe illness.

In Los Angeles County in 2006, there were two possible cases of tetrodotoxin poisoning that were linked to consumption of fish labeled as monkfish.

The product was imported and distributed by Hong Chang Corp., Santa Fe Springs, CA. Since September 2006, Hong Chang Corp., has distributed 282 boxes of product to distributors in California, Hawaii, and Illinois. The fish is packaged in 22-pound boxes labeled as “FROZEN MONKFISH GUTTED AND HEAD-OFF,” “Product of China.” However, retail locations may have repackaged and relabeled the fish as “Bok.” CDHS is working to identify the distribution of the product in California.

Consumers should not eat the fish because tetrodotoxin cannot be eliminated by cooking or other methods of preparation. Consumers who may have purchased the suspect fish are advised to throw it away. The fish should be handled with extreme care because the toxin can be present in its skin or meat. Consumers are advised to thoroughly wash their hands after any contact with the fish.

Tetrodotoxin is a powerful neurological toxin. Symptoms of tetrodotoxin poisoning can occur 30 minutes to several hours after consumption of the toxin. Symptoms include tingling of the lips or the tongue that may be followed by numbness, pricking or burning of the face, arms and legs. Other symptoms include headache, abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting and difficulty walking. In severe cases, individuals may experience problems with breathing and speaking followed by



paralysis possibly leading to death. Consumers experiencing the above symptoms after eating the fish should seek immediate medical care.

FDA allows puffer fish to be imported into the United States only under strict provisions that minimize the risk of the toxin being present in the fish. According to the FDA, the recalled fish were not imported in compliance with those restrictions. FDA is examining all entries from the Chinese supplier and will take additional action, if warranted.”

Information about the regulation of imported puffer fish can be obtained from the FDA at the following website: http://www.fda.gov/ora/fiars/ora_import_ia1620.html.

