

## OPINION

# Schuette rebuff should end fight against mercury standards

Joel D. Blum and Dr. Sharon Swindell Published 7:01 a.m. ET June 15, 2016 | Updated 8:06 a.m. ET June 15, 2016



(Photo: Mark Wilson/Getty Images)

This week the U.S. Supreme Court rejected Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette's latest effort to block federal mercury standards. We ask the Attorney General, after four years of fighting, to let it go. Let's embrace mercury limits, not fight them. As a scientist and a pediatrician, we are deeply troubled when the futures of children are jeopardized because science is cast aside, and decisions are made based on politics and bureaucracy.

Mercury, like lead, is a neurotoxin. Also like lead, mercury is most harmful to children and can impact fetal development leading to a lifetime of harmful effects on language, memory, visual-motor skills, and attention. Most mercury exposure comes from the consumption of fish. In short, mercury emissions from industrial

sources like power plants are deposited on land and water where some is converted to methylmercury. This highly toxic form of mercury enters food chains and bio-accumulates in fish. When people eat contaminated fish they ingest and accumulate methylmercury in their bodies. Pregnant women share that mercury with highly vulnerable fetuses.

The real and present danger of mercury in Michigan fish has resulted in fish advisories for nearly every lake and river in our state. These advisories, developed through collaboration between Michigan State Agencies, identify fish species that should be limited or completely avoided. Data show high mercury levels in fish consumed in the Great Lakes region and species with the highest mercury include locally-caught walleye, bass and pike and locally-bought swordfish, king mackerel, shark and tilefish.

But fish is too good a source of nutrients to give it up completely — and many types of fish have low levels of mercury. The EPA and FDA jointly offer recommendations online for fish with lower mercury levels that can be found in stores, including salmon, pollock and cod.

Schuette's argument for fighting mercury standards has been that the measure would cost Michigan ratepayers. Yet our state's large coal-plant owning utilities like Consumers Energy and DTE have filed documents saying they are moving forward with mercury controls. While Michigan's plants are on track to emit less mercury, if successful, Schuette's efforts would allow plants in other Midwestern states to keep releasing mercury that deposits in Michigan's lakes, rivers and streams contaminating our fish.

We know mercury contamination threatens our children's futures. As weather warms, and parents take their children fishing, let's commit to a future when it will be safe to eat what we catch. Let's work for a future when parents don't have to worry about exposing their children to unsafe levels of mercury. Schuette should end his effort to block limits on mercury emissions. Michigan's children need an advocate in the Attorney General's office.

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