Ciguatera Fish Poisoning

A food borne illness caused by eating certain reef fish whose flesh is contaminated with ciguatera toxin.

**How do people get ciguatera fish poisoning?**

Ciguatera is a toxin produced by marine micro-algae specifically a dinoflagellate, called *Gambierdiscus toxicus*. Tropical marine fish accumulate this toxin through their diet by eating algae or smaller fish. When humans eat contaminated fish, they develop a condition called ciguatera fish poisoning.

**Symptoms**

Ciguatera poisoning usually starts 2-24 hours after eating fish with this toxin. The most common signs are:

- Numbness in fingers, toes, lips, mouth and throat.
- Burning sensation on contact with cold water.
- Joint and muscle pain.
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and headache.

**Treatment**

- Seek medical attention at the on-set of the symptoms. There is no definite treatment for Ciguatera in Fiji, however doctors can prescribe medications to relieve discomfort and pain.
- People recovering from fish poisoning should avoid eating reef fish for at least 6 months.

**Minimizing the risk**

1. Ciguatera toxin fish cannot be destroyed by freezing, cooking or any other process.
2. Ciguatera toxin fish cannot be detected by appearance, odor, texture or taste.
3. Avoid eating head, liver or other viscera (eg. intestine) of the fish as toxin is concentrated in these parts.
4. Avoid eating large fish. (Limit whole weight to around 3kg per fish).

**Outbreak areas**

Ciguatera poisoning mostly occurs in areas which has:

1. Rapid increase in algae in the water system.
2. Recent habitat degradation through developments, natural disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis, phase shift.
4. High oil spills (near jetties).

For more information contact

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