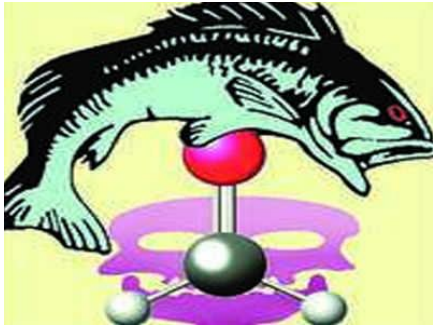


## Bihar government imposes 15-day ban on fish trade in Patna

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PATNA: The state government has banned the sale, transport and storage of all kinds of fish under the Patna Municipal Corporation (PMC) area for 15 days, principal secretary (health) Sanjay Kumar said on Monday. The decision was taken after lab test of fish samples collected from different markets in Patna confirmed the presence of formalin and heavy metals.

“If needed, the ban period may be extended. We will create awareness among people that consumption of fish is not fit for health, for now. We will also send samples to lab for test and legal action,” Sanjay said.

Joint secretary (health) Kaushal Kishore, who is also the nodal officer of food safety, said anyone found violating the ban order would be liable to Rs10 lakh fine or seven years’ imprisonment or both under Section 59 of Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. “The issue is related to public health. Hence, strict action needs to be taken. Patna district administration will be roped in to check the sale of fish,” he said.

Kumar said four pieces of fish weighing 1kg each were picked up on Sunday and Monday as legal samples. “The samples will be sent to the lab on Friday evening. These have been sealed with the signature of the seller and the food safety officer, who has collected the samples. In case the fish is found unfit, legal action will be taken against the sellers,” he said.

Excess level of formalin was found in seven out of ten fish samples sent to a central laboratory in Kolkata in October. The test report received by the department last week also found heavy metals like lead, cadmium and mercury in all the samples. Six out of the 10 samples were of fish from Andhra Pradesh, two each from West Bengal and local ponds and rivers. The samples were picked from Bazar Samiti, Gulzar Bagh, Raja Bazar and Boring Road markets.

He said formalin is a cancerous chemical used as preservative and heavy metals enter the fish through food chain. Pointing to the harmful effects of formalin, Kumar said it causes cancer, pneumonia, bronchitis and hepatitis. Lead causes mental retardation and badly affect kidney and nervous system. Cadmium too damages kidney and also causes lung cancer and bone disease. Mercury reduces immunity and causes nervous system and kidney-related diseases.

Kumar also said state animal husbandry department will be requested to send its team to West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh to find out the process of fishing and how heavy metals entered the water and subsequently the food chain. "Many people earn their livelihood from sale of fish. Hence, we will try to get the issue sorted out as soon as possible," said Kumar.