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FWC reminds public that puffer fish ban is still in effect

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) advises the public that its order prohibiting all harvest of puffer fish from the waters of Volusia, Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie and Martin counties remains in effect.

Health advisories have previously warned people not to eat puffer fish harvested from the Titusville area (Brevard County) because the fish may contain a naturally occurring toxin that can cause serious illness or death. The FWC has included all of the Indian River in its closure as a precautionary measure.

The FWC's order, originally issued on April 25, 2002, is based on verified occurrences of severe illnesses caused by consumption of puffer fish. Two persons reportedly became ill from eating puffer fish last week. The Commission intends its order to serve as a deterrent to additional harm to Floridians and visitors.

Several species of puffer fish are included in the harvest prohibition. They include southern puffer, northern puffer, marbled puffer, bandtail puffer, checkered puffer and least puffer. Puffer fish, sometimes called "puffers" or "blowfish," achieve their globular shape as they swell by swallowing water or air.

People are advised not to eat puffer fish because of the dangers of saxitoxin poisoning, which can occur even with fish that were caught previously, frozen and thoroughly cooked. The FWC's puffer fish closure expires at 12:01 a.m. Oct. 22, unless it is repealed earlier or extended by a subsequent order.

More information about puffer fish and their toxic nature is available online at www.floridamarine.org. Search under "puffer fish."