

The Nunavik Natsiq Monitoring Program

Natsiq (ᐃᑦᑭᑦᑭᑦ, ringed seals) are a key species in Nunavik. They have sustained and clothed Inuit communities for thousands of years. In recent years, hunters have raised concerns over natsiq health and numbers. Due to these concerns and a lack of documented data on seals, the Nunavik Marine Region Wildlife Board (NMRWB) began a community-based natsiq monitoring program with four Anguvigait and support from Makivvik. The program began in 2019, bringing together Inuit knowledge and western science.

The natsiq monitoring program is engaging **hunters, youth, elders and biologists** in four communities so far: Inukjuak, Tasiujaq, Kangirsujuaq and Kuujjuaq. The program's main goal is to **document seal health and diet** to ensure that seal meat remains safe to eat.

Seal tissue sampling

Hunters collect tissue samples and seal data.

Hunting excursions with youth

With the help of culture teachers and hunters, youth learn the basics of seal hunting and sampling.

Laboratory analysis

Tissue samples are sent to the Nunavik Research Center in Kuujjuaq for analysis.

Results are returned to the Anguvigait and communities.

Stomach dissections

Seal stomachs are shared with classrooms where youth learn to dissect them to see what they were eating.

Seal skin workshops

Elders and women teach youth in classrooms, and women in sharing circles, about how to prepare and use seal skins.

What do we test for?

The laboratory tests for heavy metals and parasites in seals like toxoplasma and trichinella. Raw or undercooked meat that contains toxoplasma can infect unborn children of pregnant women. **In general, if the meat is well-cooked, it is safe to eat.**

What are we learning so far?

The seals are most commonly **eating arctic cod, sand lance, shrimps and scuds.**

So far, the seals tested are not infected with **trichinella**. Twenty percent had **toxoplasma**, a parasite that causes toxoplasmosis. **Well-cooked meat is safe to eat.**

Both hunter's knowledge and measurements of blubber show that **natsiq in Upirnngaaq (early spring) have less blubber than in Ukiaq (fall).**

Want to get involved?

Please reach out to us at:
info@nmrwb.ca

Thank you to our partners, Makivvik and the Anguvigait of Tasiujaq, Kangirsujuaq, Inukjuak and Kuujjuaq, and for support from Environment and Climate Change Canada.

