

What You Need To Know About Mercury – Fact Sheet

Why is mercury a concern?

Simply put, there is too much mercury in the world's waterways. It can settle in soil or be washed into lakes, rivers and streams from a variety of sources. Mercury deposited in lakes or waterways breaks down and builds up in the bodies of fish and wildlife and humans who eat the fish.

Mercury is a poison. Mercury poisoning can come from food sources or from breathing mercury vapors. Pregnant or nursing women and children age six or younger are more sensitive to mercury.

Ohio Fish Advisory –Alert for women of childbearing age and children 6 or younger.

- Eat only one serving of fish per week from any Ohio waterway; and
- Eat no more than one fish meal per month from any body of water where mercury is a noted contaminant.

To find out more, go to the Ohio Department of Health's internet site, <http://www.odh.state.oh.us> (click on Alerts and Warnings) or call 1-800-755-4769.

How does mercury affect people's health?

The nervous system is very sensitive to all forms of mercury. Exposure to high levels of metallic mercury can cause permanent damage to the brain and kidneys and to a developing fetus. Long term exposure to low levels of mercury vapors may cause effects including irritability, tremors, vision or hearing changes and memory difficulties. Tests are available to measure mercury levels in the body. Blood or urine samples are used to test for exposure to metallic mercury and to inorganic forms of mercury. Your doctor can take samples and send them to a testing laboratory.

How can you avoid mercury poisoning?

Carefully handle and dispose of products that contain mercury, such as thermometers or fluorescent light bulbs. Do not vacuum spilled mercury because it will vaporize and increase exposure. Follow the clean-up tips in this brochure.

Use Caution Around Mercury:

- Never break open products that contain mercury.
- Do not pour mercury into any house or street drain or open waterway.
- Never burn mercury-containing products.
- Do not put mercury-containing products in the trash.
- Always properly recycle mercury-containing products at a household hazardous waste collection site.

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Consumers can make smart shopping choices by buying products that are mercury-free...

| Mercury Product | Alternative |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Thermometers | Digital or red alcohol thermometers |
| Thermostats | Digital, programmable thermostats |
| Barometers | Bourdon tube gauge |
| Blood pressure gauge | Aneroid blood-pressure gauge |
| Fluorescent and high intensity bulbs | Low mercury bulbs |
| Button batteries | Recycle |

Tips for dealing with a mercury spill

- Ventilate and evacuate room where spill occurred.
- Never try to vacuum spilled mercury.
- Wear gloves.
- Use cardboard or stiff paper to push beads of mercury together.
- An eyedropper or bulb syringe is useful for picking up mercury beads.
- On carpet, cutting and removal of contaminated area may be necessary.
- Place all clean-up supplies and collected mercury in an airtight container.
- Take all mercury to a household hazardous waste collection site.

Help keep mercury out of the environment

- Properly dispose of products containing mercury.
- Properly clean up spills.
- Buy mercury-free products.

For More Information

General mercury spill or disposal information:
Columbus Public Health
(614) 645-8191