

Healthy Home
Healthy Child



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RESOURCE CORNER

IF YOU HAVE TOUCHED MERCURY, wash your hands immediately with soap and water. **If you are concerned about your exposure to mercury**, call the Poison Control Center at 212-764-7667.

MERCURY IS DANGEROUS –

Don't throw it away with your regular garbage. To dispose properly of the sealed bag with mercury and cleaning items, bring it to your local Department of Sanitation Waste Drop-off Site. Sites are open Saturdays from 10am – 5pm except for the last Saturday of each month. Sites are also open on the last Friday of each month.

In Manhattan – Go to the Department of Sanitation garage at 605 West 30th Street between 11th and 12th Avenues.

In the Bronx – Go to the Department of Sanitation Waste Drop-Off Site in Hunts Point at Farragut Street and the East River.

Some mercury spills need to be cleaned by trained professionals. If more than 2 tablespoons of mercury spills or if mercury spills on a carpet or upholstery, behind something you can't move, or goes into a crack in the floor, call the **Department of Environmental Protection** Region 2 office, 718-482-4949. **Ask for the Bureau of Environmental Compliance.** They will send someone to your home for free to look at the spill and help you find the safest way to clean it.

Call your research worker with any questions, 646-459-9600.

MERCURY & TEETH FILLINGS
Should you worry?
NO. Dental fillings do have mercury. But, they contain only very small amounts. Studies show that **there is not enough mercury in dental fillings to harm you or your child.** Mercury in dental fillings is not a problem.

For more information on the HEALTH EFFECTS OF MERCURY, visit this web site:
<http://www.epa.gov/mercury/effects.htm>
<http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/>
Type "Mercury" in the white box and click "Search."

For more information on MERCURY IN FISH, visit these web sites:
<http://www.cdasn.fda.gov/~dms/admehg.html>
<http://www.nyhealth.gov/nysdoh/fish/fisheng1.htm>
<http://www.mndc.org/health/effects/mercury/guide.asp>

For more information on MERCURY IN COSMETICS, visit this web site:
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/pr/pr008-05.shtml>



Healthy Home Healthy Child

Protecting Your Children from Mercury – What You Can Do

Winter 2007



DEAR MOMS,

We want to help keep your family healthy. Many of you have asked about mercury exposure in your children. So far we have found mercury levels to be low in the Mothers & Newborns Study. We want to keep those levels low. Mercury is in many products we use, the air we breathe, and in fish. The good news is you can avoid mercury. In this newsletter, you will learn how to avoid mercury in fish, cosmetics, religious rituals, and when cleaning up a small mercury spill. Please call your research worker with any questions. We are always glad to hear from you. Thank you for being a part of this important study.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- ▶ Fish that are safe to eat & fish to avoid
- ▶ Cosmetics high in mercury
- ▶ Safe alternatives to azogue
- ▶ How to safely clean a mercury spill
- ▶ Resource Corner

PREGNANT WOMEN: Stay Away from Mercury & Keep Your Children Safe

PROBLEM: Mercury can harm your unborn child. This is why the Mothers & Newborns Study is measuring mercury in you and your baby. During pregnancy, mercury can affect your baby's brain and nervous system. Mercury that you breathe, eat, or touch can reach your baby. If you are nursing, mercury in your body can reach your baby through your milk.

GOOD NEWS! We found that pregnant women and babies in the study have low levels of mercury—well below levels that are dangerous to health.

PROBLEM: Mercury is in air, food, and household products.

It gets into your body in 3 ways:

- 1) When you **BREATHE** air with mercury vapors
- 2) When you **EAT** food that has mercury
- 3) When you **TOUCH** mercury

You can't see, smell, or taste mercury in air or food. BUT it is very dangerous to humans.

Mercury gets into our body mostly when we:

- ▶ Eat certain fish with high mercury levels
- ▶ Use skin products containing mercury
- ▶ Touch mercury (azogue) used in religious rituals
- ▶ Touch mercury when a fever thermometer or fluorescent light bulb breaks
- ▶ Breathe mercury vapors in the air



HOW TO AVOID MERCURY in food, skin products, and religious rituals & HOW TO SAFELY CLEAN a mercury spill

DON'T TOUCH MERCURY THAT SPILLS

PROBLEM: Mercury is in many household products. In blood pressure cuffs. In thermostats. Even in electrical switches. Things that commonly break at home that have mercury are fever thermometers and fluorescent light bulbs.

SOLUTION #1: CLEAN UP SMALL MERCURY SPILLS SAFELY

- ▶ **Don't clean up a large mercury spill yourself.**
Call a professional service (see *Resource Corner*).
- ▶ **Don't use a vacuum or broom** to clean up mercury.
They spread mercury around your home and put more dangerous mercury in the air.
- ▶ **Don't put mercury down a sink, drain, or toilet.**
- ▶ **Don't throw out mercury with your regular trash.**
(see *Resource Corner* for how to dispose mercury properly)

10 TIPS: WHAT TO DO if you have a SMALL mercury spill at home

Some mercury spills need to be cleaned up by trained professionals.

If more than 2 tablespoons of mercury spills at home, call a trained professional to clean it up safely (see *Resource Corner*).

To clean up a small mercury spill, follow these steps:

1. Open a window and run a fan to get vapors out of your home.
2. Keep children away from the spill area.
3. Remove any metal jewelry that you are wearing before cleaning up a spill. Mercury is a metal and may stick to your jewelry.
4. Wear rubber gloves when cleaning up the spill.
5. Carefully pick up any broken glass (from thermometers or light bulbs). Use sticky tape to help pick up small pieces. Put glass in a plastic bag and tie up tight.
6. Scoop up mercury drops with a stiff piece of paper. Sticky tape also helps to pick up small droplets. Put mercury in a plastic bag and tie up tight.
7. Shine a flashlight around the spill area to find smaller drops. Use a cloth rag to clean up.
8. Throw away rags, paper, and tape used to clean up the mercury. Put all in a plastic bag and tie up tight.
9. Use a heavy plastic trash bag to double bag all bags of broken glass, mercury, and cleaning items. Tie the bag tight.
10. After cleaning, wash hands, and stay out of the room where mercury spilled for as long as possible. Keep the window open or a fan running.

DON'T EAT FISH HIGH IN MERCURY

PROBLEM: Eating fish is very good for you. It can help keep your heart healthy. BUT, some fish contain a lot of mercury. Avoid eating too much of these fish. And do the same for your children. REMEMBER—Mercury has no smell or taste. So you can't smell or taste mercury in fish.

SOLUTION #2: EAT FISH LOW IN MERCURY

(Source: Natural Resources Defense Council)

It is safe to eat ✓catfish ✓pollock ✓shrimp
✓wild or canned salmon ✓canned light tuna

- ▶ **Don't eat** King Mackerel, Marlin, Orange Roughy, Shark, Swordfish, Tilefish, and Tuna that is Ahi or Bigeye. These fish have high levels of mercury.
- ▶ **Don't eat more than 6 ounces per week** of canned Albacore Tuna.
- ▶ **Don't eat more than 3 servings per month** of Bluefish, Chilean Sea Bass, Grouper, Mackerel (Spanish or Gulf), canned Albacore Tuna, or Yellowfin Tuna.
- ▶ **Don't eat** fish from local waters that contain too much mercury. **Before buying fish, ask where it came from.** Do not buy fish that came from areas listed on this map.

DO NOT BUY FISH that came from these areas:



- 1 Hudson River
- 2 Harlem River
- 3 East River
- 4 NY Harbor
- 5 Kill Van Kull
- 6 Newark Bay
- 7 Arthur Kill
- 8 Raritan Bay

Source: New York State Department of Health

BEST FISH TO EAT*

CONTAIN LEAST MERCURY*

Anchovies
 Butterfish
 Catfish
 Clam
 Crab (Domestic)
 Crawfish/Crayfish
 Croaker (Atlantic)
 Flounder
 Haddock (Atlantic)
 Hake
 Herring
 Mackerel (N. Atlantic, Chub)
 Mullet
 Oyster
 Perch (Ocean)
 Plaice
 Pollock
 Salmon (Canned, Wild)
 Sardine
 Scallop
 Shad (American)
 Shrimp
 Sole (Pacific)
 Squid (Calamari)
 Tilapia
 Trout
 Whitefish
 Whiting

CONTAIN MODERATE MERCURY

Eat 6 servings or less per month

Bass (Striped, Black)
 Carp
 Cod (Alaskan)
 Croaker (White Pacific)
 Halibut (Atlantic, Pacific)
 Jacksmelt (Silverside)
 Lobster
 Mahi Mahi
 Monkfish
 Perch (Freshwater)
 Sablefish
 Skate
 Snapper
 Tuna (Canned chunk, light, Skipjack)
 Weakfish (Sea Trout)

DON'T USE COSMETICS HIGH IN MERCURY

PROBLEM: Some skin products contain very high levels of mercury, especially skin lighteners and bleaching creams. Even some teething powders for babies contain mercury.

SOLUTION #3: USE COSMETICS LOW IN MERCURY

Read the list of ingredients on labels and stay away from products with the words "mercury" or "mercurio."

STAY AWAY FROM THESE PRODUCTS:

- ▶ Recetas de la Farmacia Normal
- ▶ Miss Key Crema Blanqueadora
- ▶ Santa Cream
- ▶ Dermaline Skin Cream
- ▶ Jabón Germicida

Source: NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene



USE SAFE NATURAL HERBS & OILS

Instead of azogue, many SANTEROS and ESPIRITISTAS use natural herbs & oils from original Caribbean traditions:

- FOR: spiritual cleansing
- USE: rompe zaragüey
- FOR: removing evil influences from the home
- USE: pasote, agua de florida, bomba santera
- FOR: calming nerves/ improving digestion
- USE: agua de florida

Source: The John Snow Inc., Center for Environmental Health Studies

DON'T USE AZOGUE

PROBLEM: Another name for mercury is "azogue." Azogue is used in religious practice to ward off evil spirits and bring protection and good luck. BUT, azogue is mercury and is harmful to health. Azogue in pregnant women gets passed to unborn babies. Babies and children exposed to azogue can have developmental problems or trouble learning.

SOLUTION #4: NEVER USE AZOGUE.

Not in religious practice. Not to sprinkle in your home, car, or bath-water. Don't use it in perfume or burn it in candles. Don't even carry azogue in a pouch.

Instead, use safe natural herbs and oils used by santeros and espiritistas.



* Natural Resources Defense Council, "Mercury in Fish: A Guide to Protecting Your Family's Health."