

HOW ARE YOU EXPOSED TO MERCURY?

Exposure to mercury and methyl mercury can result in health issues. Some of the ways you can be exposed are:

- Eating shellfish or fish contaminated with methyl mercury
- Breathing vapors from mercury spills, incinerators, and industries burning fuels containing mercury, and
- Practicing rituals that include mercury.

MERCURY IN THE ENVIRONMENT

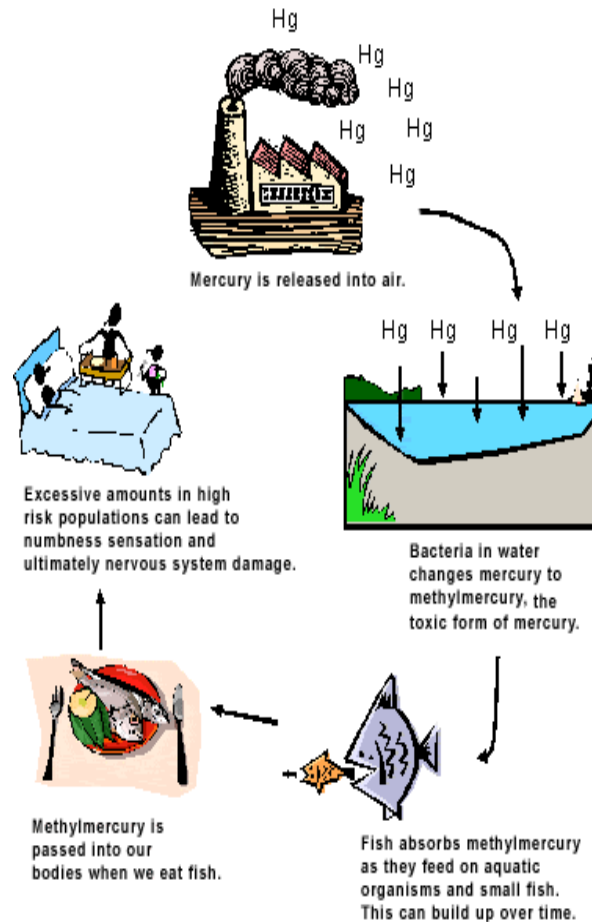
Mercury can be found throughout the environment. Human activities such as burning coal and using mercury to manufacture certain products have increased the amount of mercury in the atmosphere, soils, lakes, streams and oceans. Mercury can be found:

- In products such as thermometers, electrical switches, fluorescent light bulbs, and others, and
- In air, water and soil, which contaminates organisms in the food chain such as fish.



THE MERCURY CYCLE

Mercury discarded in landfills can seep into groundwater or be released into the air as toxic vapor. Mercury-containing trash that is burned also releases mercury vapors. Airborne mercury eventually falls to earth into surface water and is absorbed by aquatic life, especially certain fish. Mercury accumulates in fish muscle, where it cannot be trimmed away. (See back panel.)



WHO IS AT RISK?

Except in work settings where elemental mercury is used, most of the health risk from mercury exposure is due to methyl mercury ingestion from eating fish. Mercury will impact:



- The fetus and young children (Visit www.nj.gov/dep/dsr/njmainfish.htm for specific guidelines.)
- Adults who consume an unusually large amount of contaminated fish on a regular basis
- People who use mercury in spiritual or religious practices.

MERCURY CAN MAKE YOU SICK

The nature and severity of the symptoms depend on the amount of mercury exposure. Mercury ingestion can result in:

- Central nervous system damage
- Kidney and eye damage
- Mood changes with memory loss
- Disturbances in vision
- Tingling in hands, tongue, or eyelids, and
- Inability to concentrate.

CAUTIONARY MEASURES

If you work with mercury, avoid taking it home. Your employer can help you avoid mercury exposure with protective equipment and controls.

Also be aware that mercury metal is sold in botanicas for use in folk medicine under the Spanish name Azogue or the Haitian Creole name Vidajan.



Avoid spilling mercury in your home. Handle mercury thermometers with care or switch to red bulb (alcohol) or digital thermometers.

Exercise care when disposing of any product containing mercury, including mercury thermometers. Do not toss them in the household trash, which is disposed of in a landfill or at an incinerator. Either method serves as a route for releasing mercury into the environment through groundwater or the air. Instead, dispose of them at household hazardous waste days in the community.

For information on the collection of household hazardous waste in Bergen County, call the Department of Health Services at 201-634-2780 or the Bergen County Utilities Authority at 201-807-5825.

If you have a mercury spill, contact your local authorities. To obtain more information regarding mercury, call the Bergen County Department of Health Services at 201-634-2704.

To obtain information concerning New Jersey Fish Advisories, log onto the NJDEP, Division of Science, Research, & Technology Web site at: www.nj.gov/dep/dsr/njmainfish.htm

**Bergen County
Department of Health Services
Environmental Division
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Paramus, New Jersey 07652
201-634-2780**

**On-line at: www.bergenhealth.org
Health and Safety Information Line:
201-225-7000**

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Program conducted under the auspices
of Bergen County Executive
Dennis McNerney
and the Board of Chosen Freeholders

MERCURY EXPOSURE: Reducing Your Risk



**Bergen County
Department of Health Services**

Dennis McNerney
Bergen County Executive