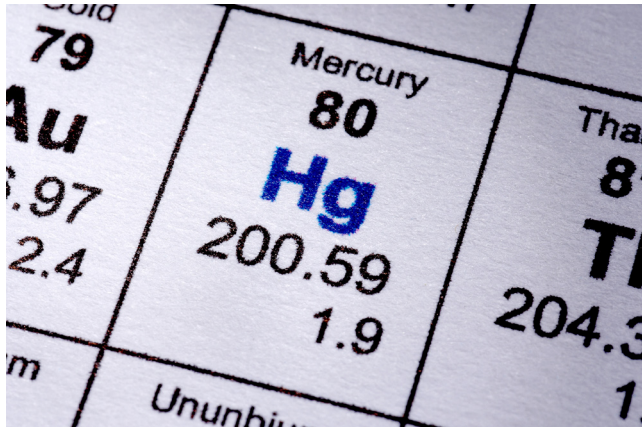


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Fact Sheet | August 2009

Mercury Exposure Prevention



In the past, mercury was used for many purposes and often people have jars of old mercury stored in their basement, garage or closet. Children are drawn

to mercury like moths to a flame, and they can find a vast number of ways to make the mercury an immediate health threat by playing with it, spilling it, and trading it with friends. Children and adolescents have found an

astonishing number of ways to make a bad situation worse by spreading mercury contamination throughout their homes, vehicles, schools, and communities.

Unfortunately, the cleanup that follows is extremely expensive and should be conducted by specialized hazardous waste cleanup crews.

Mercury is fascinating and a large number of adults admit to having played with mercury as a child - so often, they do not recognize the dangers posed by the metal. Mercury is not a toy and children should never play with it. Pregnant and nursing mothers, who are most sensitive, should never handle mercury nor remain in a room where it has been spilled.

Mercury is a poison, and it can enter the body through ingestion, inhalation, and absorption.

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Contacts:

Oklahoma Poison Control 800-222-1222

Oklahoma Department of Health 405-271-4060

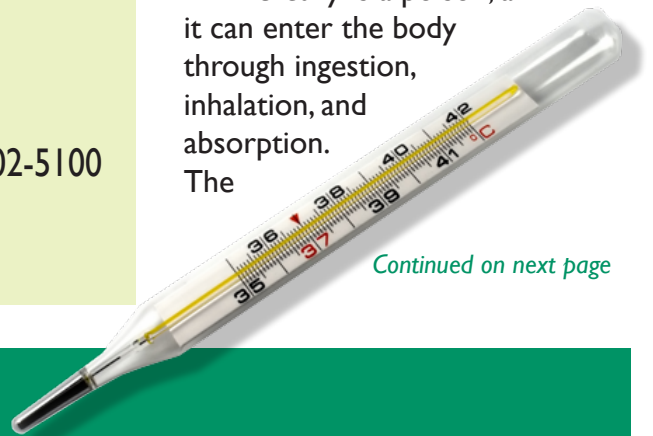
Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality 405-702-5100

DEQ 24-hour hot line 800-522-0206

National Response Center 800-424-8802

Effects on Health

- Long-term exposure to mercury affects the central nervous system. Among the effects are increased excitability, irritability, excessive shyness, tremors or shakiness, paresthesia (a sensation of pricking on the skin), blurred vision, malaise, speech difficulties, constriction of the visual field, memory loss, kidney disease, headaches, and trouble sleeping. It can also cause skin rashes, sores in the mouth, or sore and swollen gums. Mercury has not been shown to cause cancer in humans.
- Short-term exposure to high levels of mercury will have similar effects as the long-term exposure, but full recovery is more likely after short-term exposure, once the body clears itself of the contamination.
- Early symptoms of mercury poisoning are similar to many medical problems and mercury poisoning is often misdiagnosed. If you believe that you or your child have been exposed to mercury, you should consult your physician.



most common pathway for metallic mercury to enter the body is inhalation. Mercury vaporizes at room temperature. You cannot see or smell the vapors, but they are there. Mercury vapor is heavier than air, so it stays close to the floor – in the breathing zone of small children. Mercury is very detrimental to young children since it affects the brain and nervous system. It also adversely affects the lungs and kidneys. Mercury can travel through the placenta and affect a developing fetus, causing birth defects. Mercury is also excreted in breast milk and can poison a nursing infant. Long term exposure to mercury fumes can cause brain damage, coma and death.

When mercury is enclosed in a device such as a thermometer or a mercury switch on a thermostat, it poses no threat to human health or the environment. It only becomes a problem if the device breaks, and the mercury is exposed to the environment. It

Tests to Determine Exposure to Mercury

There are reliable, accurate, and easily available ways to measure mercury levels in the body.

Blood and urine samples can be taken in a doctor's office and tested using special equipment in the laboratory. There is medical treatment available for mercury poisoning. It is called chelation therapy. Chelation drugs are administered to help the body excrete the heavy metal. This drug therapy is very successful in removing mercury and preventing additional damage, but it cannot reverse the permanent damage that has been done to the patient.

is dangerous to store mercury in your home in a jar or other container. The lids may not be air-tight, which could allow vapors to escape into the home. Jars of mercury can also be an attractive nuisance for children, which could result in a large spill in the home.

If you have mercury containing devices that are in good condition, you can continue to use them; however, if you wish to dispose of these items or any mercury you may have stored in your home, DEQ requests that you **NOT** throw these items in the

trash. Please make the effort to recycle the metal (see the Mercury Spill Fact Sheet). If you have any questions, contact DEQ to help you with disposal of any mercury spill.

If you spill mercury in your home, please refer to the DEQ fact sheet on mercury spills. If you spill more than two tablespoons of mercury or you spill it into carpeting, upholstered furniture, other porous surface, or into the drain, immediately call the DEQ hotline at 1-800-522-0206, so we can have a mercury expert assist you.



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