

Mercury

Mercury is an element found in the environment. It has been used for many purposes, including agricultural, industrial and medical. Mercury can be toxic to humans, especially to the fetus or infant.

Symptoms of Mercury Poisoning

Mercury toxicity may present with poor appetite, restlessness, sweating, high blood pressure, rapid heart rate, rash, red palms, extremes of mood, and memory problems. It is toxic to kidneys and the nervous system. Since these symptoms may occur in many different illnesses, measuring an elevated mercury level in the body is necessary for diagnosis.

Mercury Thermometers

Mercury thermometers are no longer recommended, as there is potential for mercury poisoning if the thermometer breaks. Do NOT vacuum up mercury beads from a broken thermometer since this will create a vapor. Use paper to lift the beads into a plastic bag; seal the bag and dispose of it properly. Call the health department for instructions.

Vaccines

Thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative, was used in multi-dose vials of vaccines to prevent contamination. Although the amount and type of mercury in this preservative is considered safe, and although there has never been a case of mercury toxicity from thimerosal, it was removed from vaccines. There is NO evidence what so ever that thimerosal-containing vaccines cause autism or any other disorder.

Food

Since mercury accumulates in the food chain, fish that eat other fish may have higher levels of mercury. Pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, and nursing mothers should avoid foods containing mercury.

- Shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish should be avoided.
- Tuna steak and canned albacore tuna should be limited to 4-6 oz per week.
- Eat a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury no more than twice a week (maximum of 12 oz total per week) Examples are shrimp, salmon, pollock, catfish, and canned light (not albacore) tuna.
- Fish caught locally should not be eaten more than once a week. Do not consume any other fish that week.

Follow the same guidelines for young children, but use smaller serving sizes (2 oz instead of 4-6 oz)

Website resources

- www.fda.gov
- www.epa.gov/mercury
- www.epa.gov/ost/fish