

Mercury and Pregnancy



IF YOU ARE PREGNANT, BREASTFEEDING, OR PLANNING TO BECOME PREGNANT,
YOU NEED TO AVOID EXPOSURE TO MERCURY

NEW MEXICO
DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH

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Epidemiology and Response Division
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Protect yourself and your baby: Avoid Mercury

Mercury comes in many forms and all of them are potentially harmful. Mercury in your body can be passed to your unborn baby and affect the baby's developing brain and nervous system. The effects on your baby may be slight or serious, depending on the amount of mercury to which you are exposed and the stage of pregnancy. The main sources of exposure to mercury are:

Fish: Fish and shellfish are one of the most common sources of mercury in our bodies. If you regularly eat fish or shellfish that contain high levels of mercury, it can accumulate in your body to unhealthy levels. Eating fish is beneficial for both pregnant and breastfeeding women and their babies because fish and other seafood contain

omega-3 fatty acids that are necessary for your baby's health. However, some fish may contain amounts of mercury that



can harm your baby. This is why pregnant women, nursing mothers, women of child bearing age, and children should **only** eat fish low in mercury.

Shots: All pregnant women are encouraged to get a flu shot. Some flu vaccines include the mercury-containing preservative "thimerosal." Ask for a mercury (thimerosal)-free flu shot.

Dental fillings: Silver-colored dental fillings (amalgams) contain up to 50 percent mercury.

These fillings continuously leak small amounts of mercury that get into your body. It is best to avoid all dental procedures during pregnancy whenever possible.

Household products: Mercury exposure can occur when household products that contain mercury are broken, such as mercury thermometers and fluorescent light bulbs.

Jobs: Mercury can get in your body from working at a job that uses mercury, such as in a dental office or laboratory. If you are pregnant, plan to become pregnant or are nursing, work with your employer to avoid exposure to mercury.

The Health Effects of Mercury in Babies

The developing brain and nervous system of an unborn child is particularly sensitive to mercury. It is not known what the lowest level of mercury is that can harm a brain that is starting to

form or grow. Even small amounts of mercury can harm a child's brain and nervous system and cause decreases in intelligence, motor and language skills, learning capacity, attention, and memory.

The placenta concentrates mercury, so a developing baby usually has higher levels of mercury than the mother.



HEALTH EFFECTS

Mercury affects the human brain, kidneys, liver and cardiovascular system. Since mercury impairs the development of the brain and nervous system, unborn and young children are particularly vulnerable to mercury toxicity.

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Fish and Shellfish

Fish are nutritious and are an important part of a healthy, balanced diet. They contain high quality protein and other essential nutrients, are low in saturated fat, and contain omega-3 fatty acids. As with some other foods, however, it is wise to eat fish in moderation. A well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fish can contribute to heart health and proper growth and development of children.

All fish and shellfish have some levels of mercury in them. Some fish have more mercury than other. Fish that eat other fish and fish that are long-lived usually have more mercury than smaller fish and less predatory fish. Some fish have levels of mercury that may harm an unborn baby or a child's developing nervous system. This is why pregnant women, nursing mothers, women of child bearing age, and children should **ONLY** eat fish low in mercury. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that women who are pregnant, might become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children **avoid** eating shark, swordfish, king mackerel, or tilefish.

These large fish contain the most mercury. Also, white (albacore) tuna tends to contain higher levels of mercury than light tuna.

You should **limit** consumption of other fish or shellfish to one serving per week and choose seafood that tends to have lower concentrations of mercury, such as shrimp, sardines, clams, ocean perch and Atlantic haddock. Fish sticks and fish sandwiches tend to have lower levels of mercury than canned white (albacore) tuna.



Check current advisories for fish caught in New Mexico to determine which fish (and how much) are safe to eat. Visit: www.nmenv.state.nm.us/SWQB/advisories/index2.html. If you can't find the fish species or the body of water listed, eat only one serving of locally-caught fish per week.

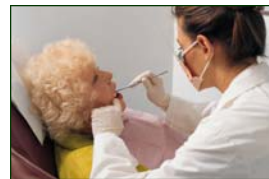
If you choose not to eat fish or shellfish, make sure you get plenty of omega-3-fatty acids in your diet, as your baby needs them for healthy brain development. Plant sources such as flax

seed oil, walnuts, avocados, and leafy green vegetables provide a good source of omega-3-fatty acids.

Exposure at Work

Some places of employment may increase mercury exposure. Examples include:

- Manufacture and preparation of silver amalgam fillings for dentistry, or working in a dental office or clinic where amalgam fillings are placed or removed



- Medical or other laboratory work that uses mercury or mercury-containing chemicals
- Mining and refining of ores (such as extraction of gold) and petroleum
- Manufacture and use of mercury-containing products

If you must work with mercury, follow all safety rules for handling mercury and for clean-up of spills. Don't carry mercury home from your job on your clothes. For information see: www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/survweb/mercury.htm.

MERCURY IN THE AIR GETS INTO WATERWAYS, THEN FISH AND SHELLFISH INGEST THE MERCURY AND IT ACCUMULATES IN THEIR MEAT.

Products Which May Contain Mercury

- Silver-colored dental fillings (amalgams)
- Some flu shots
- Some thermometers, thermostats, barometers, electrical switches and relays
- Some kinds of light bulbs, including compact fluorescent lights (CFLs), tube fluorescents, high intensity mercury vapor, and high-pressure sodium and metal halide lights
- Some athletic shoes, toys, and cards that light up or make noise
- Vials containing liquid mercury that are sold as charms for necklaces or bracelets
- Liquid mercury ("quicksilver") sold in botanicals for use in folk medicine or practices such as *Santeria* and *Espiritismo* sold under the name "azogue".
- Some folk remedies and imported cosmetics, such as skin lightening creams.

See www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/mercury/products.htm for a more detailed list of products that contain mercury.



Talk to your doctor or medical provider about breastfeeding your baby and other concerns you might have regarding mercury exposure.

Learn how to protect your baby after its birth

Children are more susceptible to the effects of mercury than adults, because their bodies, and particularly their brains, are still developing.

Be sure your babies and children get mercury-free vaccines and dental fillings that do not contain mercury. Fortunately, thimerosal is no

longer present in childhood vaccines in New Mexico.

Talk to your medical provider about breastfeeding your baby. If you have mercury in your body, ask your medical provider to advise you of the benefits and risks of breast feeding.

Know about how much fish and shellfish is safe for children to eat. (See www.nmenv.state.nm.us/SWQB/advisories/index2.html).

Limit the use of mercury-containing products in your

home by using non-mercury alternatives, for example, digital thermometers. (See: www.state.nj.us/dep/dshw/lrm/mercury_brochure.pdf or www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/mercury/products.htm).

Teach your children to never play with liquid mercury. Know how to clean up any mercury spills. (See www.epa.gov/mercury/spills/).

If you use mercury in your job, carefully follow the safety procedures at your work.

Find out more about Mercury

General

Environmental Health Bureau:

- www.health.state.nm.us/eheb/rep/metals/

NM Mercury Reduction Action Plan:

- www.nmenv.state.nm.us/Special/MercuryTF-ReportFinal_11_27_06.pdf

Agency for Toxic Substances:

- www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts46.pdf
- www.atsdr.cdc.gov/cabs/mercury/index.html
- www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/pfs46.html
- www.chem-tox.com/pregnancy/mercury.htm

Environmental Protection Agency:

- www.epa.gov/mercury

Worksite Health

Occupational and Safety Health Administration:

- www.osha.gov/SLTC/mercury/index.html

Vaccines

Mercury Content of Vaccines:

- www.vaccinesafety.edu/thi-table.htm

Dental Amalgams

State Legislation: HM13 Dental Mercury Report:

- <http://legis.state.nm.us/Sessions/06%20Regular/memorials/house/HM013.pdf>

Mercury Disclosure:

- <http://thomas.loc.gov> Search for HR 2101, Mercury in Dental Fillings Disclosure and Prohibition Act

Amalgam safety:

- www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/md-im/applic-demande/pubs/dent_amalgam-eng.php

Fish / Shellfish

Environmental Protection Agency and Food and Drug Administration:

- www.epa.gov/ost/fish
- www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admeHg3.html

What do these have in common?



All may contain mercury. Learn how to protect yourself and your children.

Limit the use of mercury-containing products in your home by using non-mercury alternatives, such as digital thermometers.