

## **METALLIC MERCURY FACT SHEET**

### **What is metallic mercury?**

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and exists in numerous forms. It is a shiny, silver-white metal that is a liquid at room temperature. It is used in glass thermometers, fluorescent light bulbs and some electrical switches.

### **How can you be exposed to metallic mercury?**

You can be exposed through skin contact, breathing air, drinking water or eating food that has been contaminated with mercury. You can be exposed due to a spill from a broken thermometer, a damaged electrical switches or a released from dental amalgam fillings.

### **What are the immediate symptoms of exposure to metallic mercury?**

Short-term exposure to high levels of metallic mercury vapors may cause effects including lung damage, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, increases in blood pressure or heart rate, skin rashes, and eye irritation. Kids exposed to high levels of metallic mercury can exhibit symptoms of poisoning: swollen red gums, increased saliva, weight loss, diarrhea and/or stomach pain, cramping in both legs and arms.

### **What are the long-term health effects of exposure to metallic mercury?**

The nervous system is very sensitive to all forms of mercury. Exposure to high levels of metallic, inorganic, or organic mercury can damage the brain, kidneys, and developing fetus. Effects on brain functioning may result in irritability, shyness, tremors, changes in vision or hearing, and memory problems.

Children poisoned by mercury may develop problems of their nervous and digestive systems, and kidney damage. Mercury's harmful effects that may be passed from the mother to the fetus include brain damage, mental retardation, incoordination, blindness, seizures, and inability to speak.

### **How can I reduce the risk of exposure to metallic mercury?**

You can protect your kids by teaching them not to play with the shiny, silver liquids. Check any medicines or herbal remedies that may contain mercury. If a thermometer breaks, do not try to vacuum or blot it up with a cloth or towel; that will only spread the mercury and break it up into smaller beads, making it more difficult to find and remove. To clean up the spill contact 911 and describe the container and area affected. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that pregnant women and women of childbearing age who may become pregnant limit their consumption of shark and swordfish to no more than one serving per month.

**What should I do if I think I have been exposed to metallic mercury?**

If you think that you have been exposed directly to metallic mercury, remove your clothing carefully and wash your entire body with soap and water. Place your contaminated clothes into a plastic bag and seal. Place the bag into a second plastic bag and seal. **Call 911 for medical attention and removal of the contaminated items. Do not drive yourself to the hospital as you may become very ill on your way.**

**Where can I get more information on mercury?**

[www.bt.cdc.gov/](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/)

[www.dshs.state.tx.us](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us)

[www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/rtkhsfs.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/rtkhsfs.htm)

**Source of Information**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)