

### What You Should Know About The Health Risks Of Mercury

(NAPSA)—How can you protect yourself from mercury contamination in the environment—a serious problem around the world posing a major health risk to humans? A report just released by the New York Academy of Sciences offers recommendations on how we can decrease new inputs of mercury to land, air and water and suggests ways in which we can reduce our exposure to its dangers.

Studies show that eating seafood is the primary way mercury ends up in the human body, although we can also breathe it in or absorb it through our skin. Mercury bioaccumulates in the food chain and fish, which can lead to fairly high levels of methyl mercury (its most toxic form) in the fish even if the water concentration is low. Unfortunately, once mercury gets inside your system, it's difficult (or almost impossible) to get rid of it.

How dangerous is mercury? Experts agree that exposure to any form of mercury can have a toxic effect on your body. Inhaling mercury vapors for a prolonged period of time—generally seen in occupational settings—can lead to serious and irreversible neurological damage, tremors, acute bronchitis, emotional instability and insomnia. Methyl mercury, in particular, can cause ataxia, fatigue, vision and hearing loss, and potentially coma and death. For pregnant women, exposure has resulted in higher rates of spontaneous abortions as well as a number of neurological and structural abnormalities in infants—since mercury can be passed on to newborns and has been found in breast milk.

What can you do to reduce your exposure to mercury? And what can you do to help prevent mercury pollution in our environment? The New York Academy of Sciences offers these recommendations:

- Pay attention to fish consumption advisories and follow guidelines about which fish are safe to eat, especially if you are pregnant.
- Replace household thermometers with non-mercury alternatives. Also, take extreme caution in handling and disposing of



**Scientists say mercury thermometers can pose a serious health risk.**

products such as thermometers, fluorescent lamps and thermostats. Many communities offer “hazardous waste collection days” and accept most mercury-containing devices.

- Support efforts to recycle/retire mercury switches in cars, trucks and appliances.
- Burning coal in furnaces releases mercury, along with other pollutants. Substitute low-mercury-containing fuels such as natural gas.
- If you are a health professional, substitute non-mercury alternatives for mercury-containing products in laboratories and medical facilities, and exercise care in the maintenance and disposal of products like thermometers and blood pressure gauges.
- Ask your dentist about the availability of non-mercury fillings. Dentists should collect and recycle mercury in amalgam and consider installing economically feasible technologies that filter amalgam.

The report on mercury is part of an ongoing project to study the major contaminants of the New York/New Jersey Harbor and recommend ways to prevent future pollution. For further information, visit [www.nyas.org](http://www.nyas.org).

*Founded in 1817, the New York Academy of Sciences is an independent, not-for-profit organization of nearly 23,000 members worldwide committed to advancing science, technology and society.*