

Protecting Your Family from Exposure to Mercury¹

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The first time I actually saw a broken thermometer and what appeared to be really cool little liquid silver pearls that fell from it, I knew not to touch. Today's young families don't often encounter the old mercury thermometers anymore, but it doesn't mean they don't encounter mercury.

Mercury affects children in a variety of ways. Fetuses and very young children are most at risk from mercury and, when exposed, may become susceptible to problems of their nervous and digestive systems, as well as kidney damage. Pregnant and nursing mothers should also be cautious of exposure to mercury, whether through the air they breathe or the foods they eat. Mercury in the mother's body passes to the fetus and may accumulate there, potentially resulting in brain damage, mental retardation, blindness, and seizures. It can also pass to a nursing infant through breast milk.

To protect your family from exposure to mercury, carefully handle and dispose of products that contain mercury, such as thermometers or fluorescent light bulbs. Don't vacuum up spilled mercury because it will vaporize and increase exposure. If a large amount of mercury has been spilled, contact your health department. Additionally, be aware of mercury levels in medications and in the fish and wildlife you may consume. Parents should also be aware of mercury in your children's schools and consider talking with teachers and school administrators about their plan to keep your children safe.

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For additional resources on understanding mercury and protecting your family, contact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at <http://www.epa.gov>.

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To listen to the radio broadcast:

http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/289.mp3

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