

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The following recommendations are particularly important for women who are or might become pregnant, nursing mothers, infants and children.

- Only use products that are mercury-free.
- Make sure that you properly dispose of any mercury-containing items in your home (thermometers, fluorescent lamps): see www.epa.gov/mercury/disposal.htm
- Avoid mercury fungicides and fungicide-treated foods by eating only organically grown grains and produce.
- Do not eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel, Chilean sea bass, albacore (white) tuna or tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.
- Eat no more than 12 ounces (2 average meals) a week of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury: shrimp, salmon, pollock, catfish, sole, wild Alaskan salmon, some sardines, and California red snapper.
- Check local advisories about the safety of fish caught in local lakes, rivers, and coastal areas.
- Women who eat fish should get mercury levels tested before becoming pregnant.
- If you have amalgam fillings, talk to your dentist about safe ways to remove and replace them with alternative materials.
- If you work with mercury, report spills or other exposure; wear protective equipment; and avoid taking mercury home with you (shower and change clothes at the end of the day at work).
- Contact your legislator and demand adequate labeling and identification of mercury content of fish products and any other food containing mercury.
- Oppose the continued use of coal burning power plants as an energy source.

ABOUT TELEOSIS

The Teleosis Institute is devoted to effective, sustainable health services provided by professionals who serve as environmental stewards. The Institute has three major goals:



To educate health professionals about the principles and practices of Ecologically Sustainable Medicine (ESM)



To build a community-based network for professionals providing sustainable health services



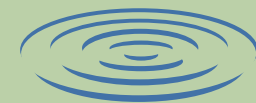
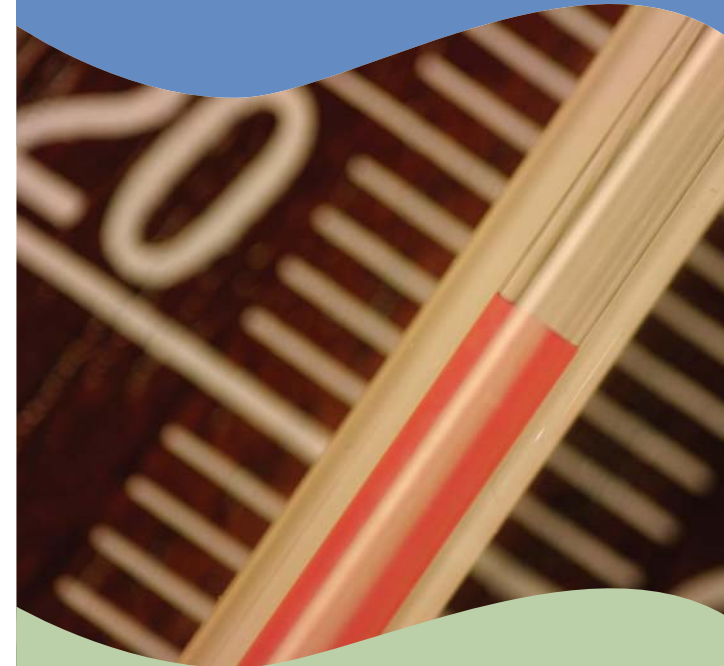
To provide access to high quality, cost-effective, sustainable medical services benefiting underserved populations and the environment in which we live



TELEOSIS

1521B 5th Street
Berkeley, CA 94710
510.558.7285
fax 510.527.1682
www.teleosis.org

THE HAZARDS OF MERCURY



TELEOSIS



WHY IS MERCURY DANGEROUS?

The neurological hazards of mercury were first noticed when women gave birth to severely impaired infants after being exposed to high levels of mercury. The EPA notes it is “clear that the developing nervous system of the fetus may be more vulnerable to methylmercury than the adult nervous system.”

The toxic effects of mercury include autism, Alzheimer’s, ALS, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s, other neurodevelopmental problems, nephrotoxicity and cancer. A link between mercury and cardiovascular disease has also been recently established.

HOW ARE PEOPLE EXPOSED TO MERCURY?

Many scientists believe the most common way people are exposed to any form of mercury is by eating fish containing methylmercury, a highly toxic form of mercury. Microscopic organisms convert mercury into methylmercury, accumulating up the food chain in fish, fish-eating animals, and people.

However, recent research indicates that mercury from amalgam tooth fillings pose a far greater hazard. Between three and seventeen micrograms per day are secreted as mercury vapor from slow corrosion, chewing, brushing and grinding of fillings. Also, while methylmercury ingested from fish is generally excreted quickly, mercury vapors from amalgams are secreted slowly over years.

Lesser sources of exposure include mercury vapors in air, ingestion via drinking water, vaccines, occupational exposures, home exposures including fluorescent light bulbs, thermostats, batteries, red tattoo ink, skin lightening creams, and over-the-counter products such as contact lens fluid and neosynephrine. The EPA warns that “metallic mercury is often found in school laboratories as well as in thermometers, barometers, switches, thermostats, and other devices found.” And, because the effects of mercury toxicity are much more severe for infants and children, even “lesser” exposure sources such as thermometers, vaccines and amalgam tooth fillings are extremely hazardous to them.

Studies show that today in the United States the average person’s body contains about 10-15 milligrams of mercury. Inhaled mercury fumes go into the blood, as mercury is soluble and passes through the lungs. Some mercury is retained in body tissues, mainly in the kidneys, which store about 50% of body mercury. The blood, bones, liver, spleen and fat tissues retain mercury; it also gets into the brain and nerve tissue, causing many of the previously mentioned nervous system disorders.



HOW DOES MERCURY ENTER THE ENVIRONMENT?

The largest source of mercury in the air (40%) comes from coal-fired power plants. Industrial boilers are second (10%). Municipal waste incinerators are third. Medical waste incineration places the health care sector as the fourth-largest source of mercury air emissions.

Industries with high potential for mercury exposure

- Manufacture of barometers and thermometers
- Ink and dyes
- Dentistry
- Dental amalgam fabrication
- Hospitals and medical waste
- Paint
- Neon lights
- Mirror manufacturing
- Paper
- Insecticides
- Pesticides
- Embalming
- Explosives and fireworks
- Jewelers
- Wood preserving
- Photography