

Mercury in Your Home

Mercury is a toxin that occurs naturally and is also released into the environment by man. Once in the environment, mercury can cause acute and chronic health effects especially among infants and children, pregnant women, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems. Some health effects of mercury include: skin allergies, mood and mental changes, disorder of the nervous system, burns or severe irritation, nausea, and kidney damage. Credible epidemiological studies have reported an association between methylmercury exposures in males and increased risks of myocardial infarction and premature mortality (Rice and Hammitt, 2005).

Below is a list of items in your home that may contain mercury. These items may release mercury when improperly disposed of, broken, or mishandled.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some latex paints manufactured before 1992 (mercury was used to prevent mildew) 2. Thermometers 3. Thermostats (household switches) 4. Batteries 5. Fluorescent lamps 6. Disinfectants 7. Antiseptics 8. Pesticides produced before 1994 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Diuretics (drug that increases urine discharge) and preservatives 10. Old chemistry sets & toys 11. Athletic shoes w/flashing lights 12. Barometers 13. Older microwave ovens 14. Some clothing irons with an automatic shut-off switch 15. Home blood pressure gauges |
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Whenever possible, mercury-free alternatives should be chosen to replace these items.

Mercury-containing Product	Mercury-free Alternative
Latex paint manufactured before 1992	Use latex paint manufactured after 1992.
Thermometers	Replace with digital or red alcohol thermometers.
Thermostats	Replace with a digital thermostat; this has the added benefit of allowing you to program your thermostat to automatically adjust the temperature at night and when you aren't home.
Batteries	Replace with alkaline batteries or batteries that are easily recycled (e.g., rechargeable nickel-cadmium, long lasting lithium).
Fluorescent lamps	Replace with lamps that are labeled as low mercury lamps; these can be recognized by their green endcaps or green printing on the bulb.
Antiseptics	Mercury-free alternatives include Neosporin and Mycin. Talk to your pharmacist about other alternatives.

Pesticides	Do not use pesticides produced before 1994.
Diuretics & preservatives	Talk to your pharmacist about alternatives.
Old chemistry sets & toys	Check chemistry sets and toys to be sure they are mercury-free.
Athletic shoes w/flashing lights	New shoes are mercury free.
Barometers	A Bourdon tube gauge is an alternative to mercury-containing barometers.
Older microwave ovens	New models do not contain mercury switches.
Clothing irons	Irons with mercury-free automatic shut-off switches are available.
Home blood pressure gauges	An aneroid blood-pressure unit is a mercury-free option.

Disposal of your old mercury-containing products

If you would like to replace your mercury-containing items with mercury-free alternatives, you will need to dispose of your mercury-containing items safely. Some cities and counties conduct annual collections of household hazardous wastes, while others have permanent collection facilities or sponsor curbside pickup programs. Many of these programs will accept mercury thermometers and a few will also accept thermostats, fluorescent lamps or other mercury-containing items. View the list of household hazardous waste collection programs at <https://www.colorado.gov/cdphe/household-hazardous-waste-collection-programs>.

If your city or county does not have a household hazardous waste collection program that accepts mercury-containing items, contact your local health department or email the Mercury-free Colorado Program at cdphe.hmmcury@state.co.us.

More information about mercury and its health effects

1. Children's Environmental Health Network. <http://www.cehn.org/our-work/eco-healthy-child-care/ehcc-faqs/mercury/>
2. Medline Plus. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/mercury.html>