

# HEALTH REPORT

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## MERCURY PRESENCE IN ENVIRONMENT CAN HAVE HARMFUL EFFECTS ON PEOPLE

Much has been written recently about vaccines that contain a mercury compound known as Thimerosal. This substance has been used as a preservative in vaccines since the 1930s and is still present today in shots for influenza and tetanus. There is growing concern among individuals and awareness groups that Thimerosal is responsible for a tremendous increase in the numbers of children who exhibit signs of autism after receiving shots.

In addition to the now well-known Thimerosal compound, mercury is present in our environment in two other major ways. The first is elemental mercury and the second is known as methylmercury. As the potential effects of these substances can be harmful to humans, especially children, it would be wise to have an understanding of their constitution and their presence in the environment.

Mercury in its elemental form is present in many phases of everyday life. It is used in thermometers, electrical switches, thermostats and batteries, for example. As long as mercury and mercury vapor is not allowed to enter the environment, there is little to no concern about its presence. However, if a thermometer breaks, for instance, it would be a good idea to avoid breathing the air in the vicinity of a spill. Breathing mercury vapors can cause headaches, tremors, emotional changes and even affect the kidneys, the respiratory system or cause death in very high concentrations.

By far the most severe problem with mercury contamination in the general environment today has to do with the pollution of our lakes and rivers. Mercury, mainly produced by coal burning power plants, enters these bodies of water through rainfall and is then attacked by microbes in the water. This converts the elemental mercury to methylmercury which then has the potential to enter the food chain through fish. Animals and humans who eat the fish ingest this form of mercury.

Methylmercury is a poison that can be potentially harmful to adults and is proven to be even more harmful to children, especially developing fetuses. It is known that mothers who showed no effects of mercury poisoning have given birth to children with severe disabilities. Additionally, such problems as lack of coordination, speech/hearing impairment, muscle weakness and disturbances in touch sensations have all been noted as occurring with methylmercury poisoning.

Raising one's knowledge and awareness of the mercury in the environment and avoiding it can be a contributing factor to healthy living. First off, be aware that some vaccines still contain Thimerosal. If you are absolutely unable to avoid vaccines, there are now other preservatives that can be used instead of Thimerosal that will keep vaccines free of contamination.

Next, should elemental mercury appear in the environment through a break or accident, clean it up fast and avoid breathing the vapors. Finally, since eating fish is the main manner that methylmercury is ingested, it is a good idea to avoid eating fish that comes from contaminated lakes and streams. This is a warning that pregnant mothers-to-be especially need to heed as mercury can be, of all things, the most harmful to an unborn child.