



Department of Health

Bureau of Environmental
Health & Radiation
Protection

Act fast when you spill mercury.

Mercury vapors are harmful to your health and need to be cleaned up in the right way.

Mercury is a common liquid metal used in some thermometers, dials on some blood pressure cuffs, fluorescent light bulbs, barometers, batteries, and some electrical switches. It is shiny, silver, and odorless.

When items with mercury break or are spilled, the mercury may separate into many small beads and spread throughout the room. The mercury from the spill can go into the air and form mercury vapor. These vapors are colorless, odorless, and harmful to your health.



Follow these steps after a mercury spill:

1. Leave all contaminated items in the spill room.

Before leaving the room, remove the contaminated clothing, shoes, or other items so you do not track mercury outside the spill room. Clean clothing and shoes not from the spill room may be put on.

2. Vent the spill room to the outdoors.

- Turn off all air circulation systems in the building.
- Open windows and doors to the outside.
- Close and seal off doors from other parts of the building.

3. Leave and close off the spill room.

Use caution tape or plastic to cover the doors. Only allow the necessary people to enter and clean up the spill.

Important: Pregnant women, children, and pets should be removed from a spill room and not allowed back inside until the spill has been cleaned up.

4. Seek information and support with clean up, disposal, and health concerns.

- **Clean up:** Contact the [Ohio Poison Centers](#) Poison Control Hotline as soon as possible and follow their instructions for clean-up of mercury and mercury-contaminated items. Be sure to tell them what steps you have already taken, if any, to clean up the spill so they can give you guidance. Speak with an expert by calling 1-800-222-1222 or chatting online.
- **Disposal:** Contact your [local health department](#), municipal waste authority, or local fire department for directions on getting rid of mercury and mercury-soiled items.
- **Health concerns:** Contact your doctor if you have symptoms or health concerns.

Ohio Poison Control



Local Health Departments



NEVER!

- **Never use a household vacuum cleaner or shop vac® to clean up mercury!**
 - This can spread it through the air.
- **Never wash mercury-soiled items in the washing machine!**
- **Never use a broom on a mercury spill because it will be harder to clean up!**
 - This can spread it around.
- **Never pour mercury down the drain!**
- **Never heat mercury!**

How does mercury affect your health?

Mercury vapors and methylmercury are the most dangerous forms because they can reach the brain. Brain damage from mercury can cause irritability, shyness, tremors, changes in vision or hearing, and memory problems.

Exposure to all kinds of mercury can also permanently harm kidneys and unborn children.

Short-term exposure to mercury in the air can cause lung damage, upset stomach, vomiting, diarrhea, increases in blood pressure or heart rate, skin rashes, and eye irritation.

Being exposed to mercury does not necessarily mean you will have health effects. Whether you get sick from exposure to mercury depends on the dose (amount you were exposed to), duration (how long you were exposed), frequency (how often you were exposed), and personal factors (such as age and overall health).

Is there a medical test to show whether you have been exposed to mercury?

Yes, there are two tests that measure mercury levels in the body. Blood or urine samples are used to test for exposure to mercury.

For exposures greater than a few days, a urine test is recommended. Consult your doctor if you think you should be tested or have medical questions.

How can I reduce the chances of a mercury spill happening in my home?

Consider replacing items containing mercury in your home. Mercury can be found in consumer products such as barometers, batteries, blood pressure cuffs, fluorescent light bulbs, electrical switches, and thermometers.

Recycle products according to local, state, and federal laws, and replace them with new, mercury-free products. For more information on disposal, contact your local authorities. You can also use [Earth911's Recycling Locator](https://search.earth911.com/) (https://search.earth911.com/) to find a recycling facility near you.

For more resources on mercury spills, visit [U.S. EPA's What to Do if You Have a Mercury Spill webpage](https://www.epa.gov/mercury/what-do-if-you-have-mercury-spill) (https://www.epa.gov/mercury/what-do-if-you-have-mercury-spill).

For more information on chemical exposures and your health, visit the [ODH Health Assessment Section webpage](https://odh.ohio.gov/has) (https://odh.ohio.gov/has).

Contact the ODH Health Assessment Section at BEHRP@odh.ohio.gov or by calling 614-728-9452.

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