



# Eco-Healthy Child Care

Eco-Healthy Child Care ensures early childhood learning environments are as healthy, safe and green as possible by reducing children's exposure to toxic chemicals.



## Mercury

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### Health Concerns

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that can damage the brain and nervous system. Effects on brain function include tremors, irritability, changes in vision or hearing, and memory problems. Infants, children, and pregnant women are most vulnerable to the negative health effects of mercury. This neurotoxin is passed to the fetus during pregnancy, and to newborns through breast milk. Harmful effects include blindness, seizures, brain damage, and inability to speak. Children may develop problems affecting their nervous and digestive systems and could suffer kidney damage.

### What Is Mercury and Where Is It Found?

Mercury is a naturally occurring heavy metal that is released into the environment by human activity. For example, coal-burning power plants emit mercury that then falls from the air and settles and accumulates in streams and oceans and is turned into methyl-mercury. Once methyl-mercury is in the water, it increases in concentration as it moves up the food chain, accumulating in long-lived fish and their consumers.

Mercury is also released into the environment through mining, and by improper disposal of mercury-containing items such as batteries,

fluorescent light bulbs (including compact fluorescent light bulbs) and mercury thermometers.

### How Might I Be Exposed?

- Eating fish contaminated with methyl mercury (e.g., shark, tuna, and swordfish).
- Breathing vapors from broken thermometers or other mercury-containing products.

### How Can I Reduce My Exposure?

- Limit intake of large, long-lived fish. Pregnant women, nursing mothers and children under six years old should not eat more than two servings per week (Adult serving = 6 oz.; child serving = 3 oz.). If you eat locally-caught fish, check with your health or environment department regarding fish advisories.
- Use digital thermometers; do not use mercury thermometers.

- Take used batteries, mercury thermometers, fluorescent light bulbs, and other mercury-containing products to a hazardous waste facility. Visit [www.earth911.org](http://www.earth911.org); enter your item and zip code and locations will be provided.
- Support green alternatives to coal-fired power plants, such as wind and solar energy.
- Make sure mercury spill cleanup kits are available in areas with mercury-containing equipment (4-5 ziplock bags, thick trash bags, gloves, paper towels, cardboard, eyedropper, duct tape).
- If there is a mercury spill, immediately contact your health department for clean-up instructions and resources. Never use a vacuum

cleaner or broom to clean. It will spread the mercury. Use cardboard or an eyedropper to gather mercury beads. Always wear gloves.

- Properly dispose of broken mercury-containing items and clean-up tools by taking the waste to a hazardous waste facility. Never pour mercury down a drain.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Call: 202-543-4033, ext. 13**

**Email: [info@ecohealthychildcare.org](mailto:info@ecohealthychildcare.org)**

**Visit: [www.cehn.org/ehcc](http://www.cehn.org/ehcc)**

### Mercury Resources

- Mercury in the Environment  
[www.usgs.gov/themes/factsheet/146-00](http://www.usgs.gov/themes/factsheet/146-00)
- Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch  
[www.mbayaq.org/cr/SeafoodWatch.asp](http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/SeafoodWatch.asp)
- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)  
[www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts46.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts46.html)
- Products that Contain Mercury  
• [www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/mercury/con-prod.htm](http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/mercury/con-prod.htm)
- Mercury in Schools  
• [www.mercuryinschools.uwex.edu/](http://www.mercuryinschools.uwex.edu/)
- National Mercury Reduction Programs Database  
• [www.newmoa.org/prevention/mercury/programs/index.cfm](http://www.newmoa.org/prevention/mercury/programs/index.cfm)
- Hazardous Waste Disposal  
• [www.earth911.org](http://www.earth911.org)

*A recipient of EPA's Children's Environmental Health Excellence Award in 2006, Eco-Healthy Child Care (EHCC) is a national program that seeks to improve the environmental health of children by partnering with child care professionals to eliminate or reduce environmental health hazards found in child care facilities. Originally created by the Oregon Environmental Council in 2005, EHCC is now managed by Children's Environmental Health Network.*

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