MERCURY

Practical information for homes, schools and communities.
A California Safe Schools education project.

Know Your Exposure

Where mercury may be found, how exposure happens, and choices that can lower risk.

WHY IT MATTERS

Mercury can harm the brain and nervous system. Developing babies and children are especially sensitive. Risk depends on the type and amount of mercury and how long someone is exposed.

WHERE MIGHT MERCURY BE FOUND?

POSSIBLE SOURCE	SMARTER CHOICE
Older thermometers, thermostats, switches and gauges	Choose mercury-free replacements. Don't take devices apart.
Fluorescent/CFL bulbs and some specialty lamps	Choose LED bulbs when replacing. Fluorescent/CFL bulbs contain mercury.
Older appliances, electronics and some vehicle parts	Check before repair or disposal; ask a qualified mechanic or hazardous-waste program.
Button-cell and some older batteries	Choose mercury-free batteries when available; use battery recycling.
Some skin-lightening, brightening or bleaching products	Avoid products that list mercury or have unclear ingredients. Don't use a suspected product.
Fish and seafood	Choose lower-mercury types and check current fish advice, especially for children and during pregnancy.
Dental amalgam fillings	Discuss mercury-free options with your dentist.

HOW CAN MERCURY ENTER THE BODY?

EAT	BREATHE	SKIN
Methylmercury in some fish.	Vapor from spilled mercury or broken products.	Some mercury-containing products can expose people through skin contact or injecting a product using mercury as a preservative.

CHECK THE LABEL

LOOK FOR: mercury • mercurous chloride • calomel • mercuric • mercurio • Hg

A product being sold online does not guarantee it is safe.

TURN OVER → disposal steps and what to do if something breaks

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Dispose Safely

Keep mercury out of homes, trash, drains, soil and waterways.

Do not put mercury-containing products in regular trash or down a drain.
Use a household hazardous-waste (HHW) program or an approved recycling option. Check accepted items and instructions before you go.

WHERE SHOULD IT GO?

ITEM	SAFER DISPOSAL
Thermometers, thermostats and mercury-containing devices	Household hazardous waste (HHW). Ask before dismantling.
Fluorescent/CFL bulbs and tubes	Lamp recycling or HHW.
Button-cell batteries	Check S.A.F.E. Centers and lacsd.org to see if they take these.
Older appliances, electronics or vehicle switches	Ask HHW, an approved recycler or a qualified mechanic.
Skin-lightening product suspected of containing mercury	Stop using it. Contact local HHW for handling and disposal instructions; don't pour it out.

LOS ANGELES AREA RESOURCES

CITY OF LOS ANGELES • S.A.F.E. CENTERS

1-800-773-2489
lacitysan.org/safecenters

LOS ANGELES COUNTY • HHW

1-800-238-0173
lacsd.org

Call or check the website for current locations, dates, accepted materials and transportation instructions before visiting.

IF A MERCURY-CONTAINING PRODUCT BREAKS

DO NOT VACUUM • DO NOT SWEEP • DO NOT POUR DOWN A DRAIN

1. Keep children and pets away. Do not touch or walk through mercury.
2. If safe, open windows to the outside, close doors to other rooms, and turn off central heating/air conditioning.
3. Do not clean spills on carpet, upholstery, near air vents, or larger than a thermometer.

SPILL HELP: Call your local health department. After hours, call your local fire department. Do not clean up until you receive guidance. **Official instructions — spill cleanup:** epa.gov/mercury/what-do-if-you-have-mercury-spill

POSSIBLE EXPOSURE: Poison Control **1-800-222-1222** (24/7). Medical emergency: call 911.