

Mercury Thermometers and Your Family's Health

Broken Thermometers, Affordable Alternatives, and Proper Disposal



~ A Broken Thermometer is a Serious Health Threat ~

Many families have had a mercury thermometer for years, without it breaking. Yet public health officials across the country report a steady stream of concerned calls from parents that have accidentally broken their mercury thermometer. Oftentimes, parents might not even know their thermometer has broken because it may have spilled into a hidden crack in the floor or soaked into the carpet. If mercury spills from a thermometer and is not cleaned up, it will evaporate causing your indoor air to reach potentially dangerous levels. Even the smallest amount of mercury needs to be treated as a serious issue.

Your Family's Health

Getting out the thermometer is often one of the first steps in caring for someone who doesn't feel well.

Ironically, the type of fever thermometer you use could be a health risk to your family and community.

Most parents today grew up with mercury thermometers in their homes. These are easy to recognize because they are made of glass with a silvery-white liquid inside. This liquid is mercury.

While mercury has proved useful in devices like thermometers, it is a toxic substance that can harm living things.

Mercury affects the human brain, spinal cord, kidneys and liver. Wildlife can exhibit the effects of mercury poisoning as well.

Currently 39 states are warning residents not to eat certain fish species caught in some lakes, rivers and streams because of mercury contamination.

In pregnant women, mercury can pass through the placenta, where it can affect fetal development of the brain and nervous system.

Affordable Alternatives

- A variety of thermometers are available at your local pharmacy.
- Many are comparable in price such as digital or glass alcohol thermometers.
- Others include inexpensive flexible forehead thermometers or the more expensive infrared ear thermometer.
- Many thermometers can be used orally, rectally, or in the armpit.
- The most important thing to consider when choosing a thermometer is finding one that is easy to use and read.



Websites with Mercury Information:

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
www.pca.state.mn.us
Minnesota Poison Control
www.mnpoison.org
The Minnesota Department of Health
www.health.state.mn.us
Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov

Broken Mercury Thermometers

1. Isolate the spill and ventilate the area.
2. Call the Rice County Solid Waste Department at 507-332-6833, poison control at 1-800-222-1222 or 9-1-1 for emergency assistance.
3. Using recommended procedures, remove mercury from shoes, clothing and skin.
4. Decide whether to clean up the spill yourself or hire an environmental contractor.

Items Needed to Clean Up a Mercury Spill:

1. 4-5 Ziplock-type baggies
2. Trash bags (2-6 mm thick)
3. Rubber or latex gloves
4. Paper towels
5. Cardboard or a squeegee
6. Eyedropper
7. Duct tape
8. Flashlight



Proper Disposal of Thermometers

Bring your mercury thermometer to the Rice County Hazardous Waste Building located halfway between Northfield & Faribault, approximately 1 mile to the east off State Highway #3 on 145th Street East (County Road 75).

Hours for Households are:

Every Wednesday from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month from 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Rice County Public Health Nursing Service

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