

# MERCURY EXPOSURE DURING PREGNANCY

How it can affect you and your baby, and how to avoid it.

## What is mercury?

Mercury (quicksilver) is a toxic metal commonly found in fish, plants, oceans, lakes, skin lightening creams and other cosmetics, mercury thermometers, smoke from coal plants, and compact fluorescent lightbulbs.

## How does mercury get into the body?

- Eating fish with mercury
- Exposing skin to spilled mercury
- Breathing mercury vapors
- Using skin lightening creams and cosmetics with mercury

### IMPORTANT:

If a pregnant woman is exposed, mercury passes to the baby through the umbilical cord. Though small amounts of mercury may pass through breastmilk from nursing mothers, breastfeeding is still best for your baby.

## How can mercury affect my baby?

### Mercury is harmful to the development of the brain and can cause permanent problems:

- Low brain, bone, and nervous system growth
- Reading/learning disabilities and lower IQ
- Increased chance of behavioral and neurological disorders
- Decreased coordination and attention span
- Kidney failure, blindness, and deafness
- Preterm birth; loss of the fetus at extremely high levels

## What can I do to protect my baby and family from mercury?

- Have yourself tested for mercury.
- Do not eat seafood that is often high in mercury such as: sharks, swordfish, eel, raw fish, the green gland or bile of crabs and lobsters, or anything caught in Newark Bay.
- Avoid imported novelty jewelry because it can have a mercury-containing pendant.
- Avoid handling or breathing in any mercury containing items such as: skin lightening creams, broken mercury thermometers, or broken compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL bulbs).
- Do not handle liquid mercury or allow it to sit in carpeting or other indoor spaces.
- Eat a balanced diet with foods rich in calcium, iron, folate, vitamin C, and vitamin D.
- If anyone you live with works with mercury, clothing can be changed at work and washed separately.

### IMPORTANT:

Eating fish is very important during pregnancy because fish have vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats that are good for your baby's development. You can minimize exposure by eating one serving (8 oz. or about the size of the palm of your hand) of wild-caught fish with low mercury content twice a week such as anchovies, sardines, shrimp, tilapia, salmon, cod, and pollock.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Speak to your doctor if you have any concerns.
- [cdc.gov/biomonitoring/Mercury\\_FactSheet.html](https://www.cdc.gov/biomonitoring/Mercury_FactSheet.html)
- [state.nj.us/dep/dsr/njmainfish.htm](https://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/njmainfish.htm)
- New Jersey Poison Control Center: 800-222-1222
- [nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/occupational-health-surveillance/mercury.shtml](https://www.nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/occupational-health-surveillance/mercury.shtml)
- [nj.gov/health/biomonitoring](https://www.nj.gov/health/biomonitoring)