



When Mercury Spills...

When liquid mercury spills, the silver puddles and beads that form scatter and give off an invisible vapor that is heavier than air. Exposure by breathing this vapor is a health hazard especially for young children and the fetus carried by pregnant women. Household pets that are close to the floor are at risk too. By acting quickly to contain the mercury and remove it from the living area of your home, you can lessen the chance that anyone will be harmed by it. This brochure gives you information on what you need to know right away when mercury spills.

After a Spill... Read This First!

- ❑ Close all doors that lead to uncontaminated areas, areas where the mercury has not spilled.
- ❑ Remove people from the room. Take off any clothing and shoes that might have mercury on them and seal them in plastic bags. Leave the bags in the room where the mercury spilled.
- ❑ Remove all pets from the area. If the pets have walked through the mercury, wipe their feet with a rag moistened with foam shaving cream to stop the spread of mercury to other areas. Put the rags into a bag and seal it, leaving it in the room where the mercury spilled.
- ❑ Isolate the room from the heating and air conditioning system by closing all air vents or registers.
- ❑ Remove your jewelry to keep it from becoming contaminated.

- ❑ Open an outside window or door in the room. If possible, place a fan so that it can blow air from the room to the outside.
- ❑ Valuable or important items, like an oriental rug, that might be contaminated can be placed in a warm, airy, non-living area for several months and then tested to see if mercury vapor can still be detected.

Decide Who Can Do the Cleanup

You can probably do a safe and thorough cleanup if:

- The spill is a small amount – a pea-sized bead or less (like in a fever thermometer).
- The spill has not been spread over a large area.
- The spill has happened recently – within a day.
- The spill is on a hard surface, for example a countertop, vinyl floor, etc.
- The spill is on an easily bagged and disposable rough object like a throw rug or pillow.
- Pregnant women should not be involved in mercury cleanups.

Even if you can clean up the spill yourself with the help of this brochure, you may want to call your state or local health department or Poison Control Center, 1-800-222-1222, for more advice.

DON'TS

Never, Never...

- ❑ **Stay in a place where mercury has been heated! Get everyone out of the area until the air can be tested.**
- ❑ Enter or allow any person to enter a contaminated area without shoe protection. Plastic grocery bags tied or taped around shoes will protect your feet and shoes from the mercury.
- ❑ Leave a contaminated area wearing contaminated clothing (including contaminated shoe covers.)
- ❑ Wear jewelry (rings, watches, bracelets) near spilled mercury.
- ❑ Vacuum or sweep spilled mercury as it will spread the mercury around.
- ❑ Heat or burn items with mercury on them.
- ❑ Pour mercury down a drain. It will sit in the drain and keep giving off vapor.
- ❑ Wash mercury-contaminated clothing or other items in a washing machine. You may contaminate your washing machine. Bag the items that may have mercury on them, seal them, mark them "mercury hazard" and put them in a place away from people and pets.
- ❑ Use household cleaning products to clean up mercury especially those containing ammonia or chlorine. They can react strongly with mercury and produce poisonous gas.

DO's

- ❑ **Immediately get people and pets out of an area where mercury has been heated!**
- ❑ Act quickly to keep mercury from spreading!
- ❑ Remove people and uncontaminated pets from the spill area, leaving contaminated clothing and other items in the room where the spill occurred.
- ❑ Place pets that have touched mercury in a crate or outdoors until they can be washed with a shampoo containing selenium sulfide like Selsun Blue®, Exsel® or Head and Shoulders Intensive Treatment Dandruff Shampoo®. Products containing selenium sulfide should not be used by pregnant women or on pregnant pets. If you or your pet are pregnant, ask your doctor or veterinarian for advice on how to remove mercury.
- ❑ Isolate the area from the "clean spaces". Shut interior doors. Close off or cover furnace and air conditioning vents or registers in the room. If possible, make the room cooler but don't open the door to a room where the mercury has not spilled.
- ❑ Open windows and doors that lead from the contaminated area to the outdoors. A fan blowing air out of the room will work best to remove mercury vapors.
- ❑ Decide if you are able to take care of the spill yourself or whether you'll need assistance. *

If you are able to do the cleanup yourself, gather the items you'll need -

- ✓ A flashlight
- ✓ Several zipper-seal plastic bags
- ✓ Some large plastic garbage bags
- ✓ An eyedropper or a syringe without a needle
- ✓ A roll of duct, masking or packaging tape.
- ✓ A utility or similar knife
- ✓ Index cards, thin cardboard, stiff paper or a rubber squeegee
- ✓ Paper towels and water
- ✓ Small artist's paintbrush
- ✓ Foam type shaving cream
- ✓ Shoe covers, newspaper to kneel on and old clothes to wear
- ✓ Rubber or latex gloves
- ✓ Powered zinc or powdered sulfur (if available in mercury spill kit or otherwise)
- ✓ Permanent marker to label bagged waste "mercury hazard"
- ✓ A cardboard box to carry the assembled items to and from the spill site
- ✓ Or ask your local health department where you can buy a mercury spill kit



Cleaning Up Small Spills – such as a broken fever thermometer



Small spills on a hard surface-

1. Remove jewelry, change into old, disposable clothing and put on rubber or latex gloves (if available).
2. Pick up all visible glass and container parts, wrap them in a damp paper towel or disposable cloth, place in a zippered plastic bag and seal the bag.
3. Carefully push visible beads together with a card and move them gently onto a creased piece of cardboard or stiff paper. Tip them into a zippered plastic bag.
4. Or, pick up beads with an eyedropper or syringe (without the needle attached) and place them into a zippered plastic bag.
5. Look for additional visible beads by turning off all the lights in the room, putting newspaper down to kneel on and shining a flashlight across the floor surface.
6. If you have a mercury spill kit, clean the area where beads too small to see might be found by sprinkling powdered zinc over the area and wetting it. When you scrape or wipe the zinc powder, the mercury will come away attached to it. Powdered sulphur works in a similar way, without wetting, and changes color when in contact with mercury. If you don't have either of those, spray foam type shaving cream across the surface, then scrape or wipe it up and put it and the card or towel into a zippered plastic bag.
7. Pay special attention to cracks, seams, or places where molding meets a surface where small beads often come to rest or roll out of sight.
8. Hard to get beads can be lifted with the sticky side of tape or with a small paintbrush whose bristles are wet with shaving cream. Put captured beads in a zippered plastic bag.
9. Do not use household cleaners, especially ones containing ammonia or chlorine because of a possible chemical reaction.
10. When you are done cleaning, air out the room thoroughly to the outdoors for at least a full day.

Small spills on soft surfaces -

1. Remove jewelry, change into old, disposable clothing and put on gloves (if available).
2. Pick up all visible glass and container parts, wrap them in a damp paper towel or disposable cloth, place in a zippered plastic bag and seal it.
3. Pick up visible beads with an eyedropper or a syringe, without the needle attached, and place them in the zippered plastic bag.
4. Or, use the sticky side of tape to pick up beads and put the tape and mercury in the zippered plastic bag.
5. Put contaminated materials such as cushions, throw rugs or stuffed toys into a garbage bag, seal the bag and label it "Mercury Hazard". Put it in a secure, non-living space. Check with your local health agency regarding testing the bagged items or disposing of them.
6. Contaminated carpeting **cannot be cleaned of mercury beads.** It must be carefully removed and disposed of. To protect your clothing, put down newspaper to kneel on and carefully cut the carpet into manageable squares (3 foot square or smaller). Cut out all the area thought to be affected and then one foot further in each direction to be safe. Fold each carpet piece onto itself to keep the beads from spilling out and immediately put it in a plastic trash bag. Follow the same process for cutting, removing and disposing of the carpet pad. Wipe down the floor space underneath the removed pad with paper towel and shaving cream and put them in a garbage bag when done. When all the pieces are bagged, seal the bag, mark it "Mercury Hazard" and put it in a secure non-living area space.
7. Air out the room thoroughly for at least one whole day.

Large Spills

For larger spills, especially in areas used by the public like a physician's office, hiring a professional cleanup contractor is usually recommended. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) has a list of professionals that are experienced in mercury cleanup that can be found on-line at <http://www.deq.state.mi.us/documents/deq-ead-p2-mercury-lgmerc.pdf> or by calling the MDEQ at 1-800-292-4706.

All spills of one pound of mercury, approximately two tablespoons or more, must be reported to state and federal agencies. Information about the notification requirement can be found at <http://www.deq.state.mi.us/documents/deq-ead-p2-mercury-lgmerc.pdf> or by calling MDEQ at 1-800-292-4706.

Note: This information is meant to help in cleaning up a mercury spill. However, every condition for every mercury spill cannot be known. When in doubt, call for advice.



Find ways to reduce mercury in the environment.

Stop spills before they happen! Many recycling centers accept mercury containing products. To find centers in your area, [click here.](#)

Testing After a Mercury Spill

Testing a Building

If you ventilate the vapors and clean up the spill yourself, your local or state health department may be able to arrange testing, at no charge to you, to find out if the cleanup has gotten rid all of the mercury.

If you hired a professional to cleanup the spill, testing afterwards, known as clearance testing, should be a part of their service to ensure a complete cleanup. See the fact sheet that MDCH created for customers of professional mercury cleanup contractors, http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdch_MercuryCleanupGuidance_85690_7.pdf.

Testing People

If you are concerned you have been heavily exposed to mercury vapor after a spill you should talk to your doctor. He or she might find it useful for you to have a blood test (for a recent exposure) or a urine test (for a longer term exposure) or both.

For more information

- ❑ Call your local health department and ask to speak to someone in Environmental Health
- ❑ Call the State of Michigan's Toxics Hotline 1-800-MI-TOXIC, (1-800-648-6942)
- ❑ Call the Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222
- ❑ Visit the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's website: <http://www.michigan.gov/deqmercuryp2>

