

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. How do I know if my lightbulbs or products have mercury in them?

- Mercury-added light bulbs manufactured after November 30, 2003, are labeled with “Contains Mercury” or “Hg” printed within a circle on the lamp. This symbol alerts consumers that these products must be handled with caution. The following link has more information on mercury-containing bulbs:  
<https://recyclesmartma.org/2022/03/watts-the-deal-with-fluorescent-light-bulbs-newsletter/>.



- Aside from mercury lamp bulbs, not all mercury-added products are labeled as containing Mercury (Hg), such as thermostats, thermometers, medical devices such as blood pressure cuffs, old button cell batteries, and electrical and electronic switches. Older electronics, such as TVs and computer monitors, may contain Cathode Ray Tubes (CRTs) which contain mercury and other hazardous waste components, and should never be thrown in the trash. By disposing of your electronics at a hazardous waste collection site, you can be assured that they will be disposed of properly. Newer electronics should also be recycled at hazardous waste collection sites. Please use the following link to see where you can drop off your mercury-added products:  
<https://maps.env.state.ma.us/dep/arcgis/js/templates/SafeMercuryDisposal/> Beyond the Bin is also an excellent resource for finding disposal locations for a variety of items:  
<https://recyclesmartma.org/beyond-the-bin-search/>

### 2. What should I do with broken mercury-added products?

- For spills of mercury over 2 tablespoons of liquid, please call 911, or the Massachusetts DEP Spill Hotline at 888-304-1133.
- For spills of less than 2 tablespoons of liquid, broken mercury-added products, or vapor releases, please call the Massachusetts DEP Mercury Programs Hotline at 866-963-7287.
  - o Detailed information about how you can clean up a spill of liquid mercury of less than 2 tablespoons, can be found on our website at:  
<https://www.mass.gov/guides/massdep-mercury-information#-mercury-disposal-and-clean-up->

### 3. How do I dispose of mercury-added light bulbs, thermometers, thermostats, electronics, barometers, and button cell batteries that are not broken?

- Mercury-added light bulbs should be put in a container to ensure they will not break.
- For all other mercury-added products, double-bag the product (place the item in one plastic bag and then place this closed bag into another plastic bag) to ensure no leakage will occur if the product breaks. Contact your local town hall for more information about where you can dispose of products that potentially contain mercury, or check out

MassDEP's Residential Mercury Disposal Map at:  
<https://maps.env.state.ma.us/dep/arcgis/js/templates/SafeMercuryDisposal/>

**4. Where can I dispose of fluorescent tube lamps, elemental mercury, or large quantities of mercury-added products?**

- Because these items are large, they may not be accepted at some collection sites. Contact your local town offices to see if there is a collection site for these items or if there are Household Hazardous Waste events that can take these items. MassDEP offers a map of events that you may be able to participate in programs or events in your community: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/safely-manage-hazardous-household-products#programs-or-events-in-your-community->

**5. What if mercury spills on the floor or an item of furniture?**

- Contact your local fire department or the Massachusetts DEP Spill Hotline at **888-304-1133**. All contaminated fabrics contaminated with the liquid mercury must be double-bagged and disposed of as hazardous waste. Call your town hall for more information about Household Hazardous Waste disposal options. Always wear gloves and avoid getting liquid mercury on your bare skin. Avoid breathing mercury vapors whenever possible. Please refer to the Mercury Cleanup guidance document available on the MassDEP Mercury Programs website: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/massdep-mercury-information#-mercury-disposal-and-clean-up->

**6. How can mercury poison me?**

- The most common ways people are poisoned by mercury are through inhalation of vapors, ingestion, eating contaminated fish, and dermal absorption caused by touching mercury. Elemental mercury is slowly absorbed through the skin, and it may cause skin and eye irritation. If a person or a pet has been exposed to mercury liquid or vapor, contact a medical professional immediately.
- Methylmercury is extremely poisonous and can damage the brain even after low levels of exposure. Methylmercury, or organic mercury is produced through bacterial processes. Methylmercury bioaccumulates up the food chain from small aquatic organisms, to small fish, to larger fish, to wildlife and humans. This type of mercury is usually found in contaminated fish. Exposure occurs when contaminated fish are eaten. Elemental mercury, which is the silver liquid found in some thermometers and switches, is most dangerous when inhaled.

**7. Is it ok to breathe mercury vapors?**

- No. Elemental or liquid mercury generates vapors at room temperature and is toxic primarily through inhalation of the mercury vapors. Elemental mercury, the silver liquid found in some thermometers and switches. If a mercury-added product is broken and the liquid mercury is released, immediately open windows to the outdoors and turn off the HVAC. Contact a medical professional if you feel unwell after any exposure to mercury.

**8. What do mercury fish advisories do?**

- Fish advisories are available for different watersheds. These advisories include the waterbody, municipality where the waterbody is present, hazard or chemical present within certain fish, and consumption limits of contaminated fish. Methylmercury or organic mercury is the type of mercury that can bioaccumulate in fish. Methylmercury is extremely poisonous and can damage the brain even after low levels of exposure. Before eating locally caught fish, check the fish advisories to confirm that the fish you are catching does not contain elevated levels of hazardous chemicals. You can find the Massachusetts fish advisories at the following link: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/fish-consumption-advisories>

**9. If I'm exposed to mercury, what should I do?**

- If you recently ate fish that may have been contaminated with mercury and you feel nauseous, contact a medical professional immediately. Next, put the remainder of the contaminated fish in a bag labeled, "Universal Waste- Mercury Containing Device". This bag should be disposed of as hazardous waste and should not be thrown in your trash bin. You can contact your Town Hall for more disposal options or find a Household Hazardous Waste Event using the following link: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/safely-manage-hazardous-household-products#programs-or-events-in-your-community->
- If the exposure is from a mercury-containing product and the mercury is less than two tablespoons of liquid, you can clean it up. If it is more than two tablespoons, call 911 or the MassDEP Spill Hotline at: 888-304-1133.

**10. What are the different routes of exposure to mercury?**

- The most common route of exposure to methylmercury (organic mercury) is through consumption of contaminated fish.
- Elemental mercury's most common route of exposure is through inhalation; however, this exposure may also cause eye irritation. Elemental mercury can be found in a variety of mercury-added products such as thermometers, car switches and dental amalgam.

**11. Who is most sensitive to mercury exposure?**

- Children and pregnant women are the most sensitive receptors to mercury poisoning. Elemental mercury can cross the placenta during pregnancy and can be transferred to infants via breast milk. Contact a medical professional immediately after any mercury exposure.

**12. I am a teacher. Is there information on mercury that I can distribute to my students?**

- Lesson plans for grades 6-8 can be found at the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry through the Center for Disease Control (CDC). [https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/dontmesswithmercury/for\\_teachers.html](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/dontmesswithmercury/for_teachers.html)