



# Eco-Healthy Child Care

Eco-Healthy Child Care is a national program created by the Oregon Environmental Council to ensure that child care settings are as healthy, safe and green as possible by reducing children's exposure to toxins.



## Mercury

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### What Is Mercury and Where Is It Found?

Mercury is a naturally occurring heavy metal that is released into the environment by human activity. For example, coal-burning power plants emit mercury that then settles on the earth and in the water. Mercury is also released into the environment by improper disposal of mercury-containing items such as batteries, fluorescent light bulbs and mercury thermometers. Once mercury is in the water, it increases in concentration as it moves up the food chain, accumulating in long-lived fish and their consumers.

### Health Concerns Associated with Mercury Exposure

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that can damage the brain and nervous system. Effects on brain function include tremors, irritability, changes in vision or hearing, and memory problems. Young children are more sensitive to mercury than adults. When mercury is passed to the fetus during pregnancy, harmful effects include blindness, seizures, brain damage, and inability to speak. Children may develop problems affecting their nervous and digestive systems and could suffer kidney damage.

### How Might I Be Exposed?

- Eating fish contaminated with methyl mercury (e.g., shark, tuna, and swordfish).
- Breathing vapors from broken thermometers or other mercury-containing products.

### How Can I Reduce My Exposure?

- Limit intake of large, long-lived fish (e.g., shark, tuna, and swordfish). Pregnant women and children under six years old should not eat more than two 6 oz. servings per week.
- Do not use mercury thermometers; use digital thermometers instead.
- Recycle used batteries, mercury thermometers, fluorescent light bulbs (including compact fluorescent light bulbs), and other mercury-containing products.
- Support green alternatives to coal-fired power plants, such as wind and solar energy.

## Mercury Resources on the Internet

- Mercury in the Environment  
[www.usgs.gov/themes/factsheet/146-00](http://www.usgs.gov/themes/factsheet/146-00)
- State and Local Mercury Collection/Recycling/Exchange Programs  
[www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/mercury/collect.htm#Oregon](http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/mercury/collect.htm#Oregon)
- Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch  
[www.mbayaq.org/cr/SeafoodWatch.asp](http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/SeafoodWatch.asp)
- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)  
[www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts46.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts46.html)
- Products that contain mercury  
[www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/mercury/con-prod.htm](http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/hazwaste/mercury/con-prod.htm)

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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