

# Facts About Mercury in Schools

## What is mercury?

Mercury is a metal found naturally in the environment. It comes in a few forms. Elemental (metallic) mercury is a shiny, silver-colored liquid that's been used to make many different kinds of products, including lots of things used in schools. You might remember it best from its use in glass thermometers.

## Why is mercury dangerous?

Just using a product that contains mercury usually isn't dangerous. But if a product with mercury in it breaks and the mercury spills out, it can turn into poisonous vapors (fumes). Breathing in these vapors is the most common way to get mercury poisoning — and also the most dangerous.

### Look familiar?

Science teachers often used mercury during experiments in class. You might even remember playing with it when you were a kid.



## What exactly happens when mercury spills?

Spilled mercury breaks up into tiny drops that can easily spread around your school and hide in small spaces (like cracks in the floor). This means that the drops can continue to turn into vapors that can be breathed in by students and staff even years after a spill.

## So mercury must not be around anymore, right?

Not exactly. Since people have learned about the dangers of making products with mercury in them, it is used less often. But many products made with mercury can still be found today. Some common sources of mercury in schools include:

- Glass thermometers
- Fluorescent (CFL) lamps and light bulbs
- Medical and science equipment
- Thermostats, switches, and other electrical devices

Since it was often used in science class, it's also possible to find mercury in bulk in school science labs.

### Did you know?

Mercury is so heavy that just 2 tablespoons weighs about one pound.

## How can mercury affect my health?

Mercury poisoning can affect the nervous system, lungs, and kidneys — and it's most dangerous for children. Breathing in mercury vapors over time may cause symptoms like:

- Feeling anxious or tired
- Not feeling hungry
- Memory problems
- Hearing problems
- Trembling (shaking)