

# Mercury Quick Facts

## Health Effects of Mercury Exposure

### What is Elemental Mercury?

Elemental (metallic) mercury is the shiny, silver-gray metal found in thermometers, barometers, and thermostats and other electrical switches.

- Mercury can break into droplets when spilled. The droplets spread easily and can build up in tiny cracks and spaces in your house.
- Mercury can vaporize (evaporate) into the air in your house. The vapor cannot be seen or smelled.
- Mercury can be toxic to people's nervous system, lungs and kidneys.



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### How can I be exposed to elemental mercury in my home?

People can be exposed to elemental mercury when household items that contain mercury are broken. Elemental mercury can also be brought into your house from abandoned industrial sites and other places. Breathing mercury vapors in air is the most

*Mercury vapor is heavier than air and tends to remain near the floor or area where the spill happened. It can build up in poorly ventilated or low-lying areas in your house.*

### How much mercury spilled in a room will make air in the room unsafe?

Any amount of mercury spilled indoors can be hazardous. The more mercury is spilled, the more its vapor will build up in air and the more hazardous it will be. Even a small spill, such as from a broken thermometer, can produce hazardous amounts of vapor if a room is small enough, warm enough and people spend a good deal of time there, as in a small bedroom.



