

A real-life medical mystery began in 2015 for a three-year-old Florida boy with puzzling symptoms. He lost weight, lost interest in eating or playing, and had leg pains. Hospitalized for a month, he grew even sicker. A flat, red rash spread across his body. His heart raced. His blood pressure sky-rocketed. He weakened and his hands and feet swelled.

Doctors first suspected but then ruled out rabies. None of many other tests identified a cause. Finally, one doctor suspected mercury poisoning. A blood test confirmed the hunch: mercury levels eight times the treatment action level!

Tests of the boy's home for mercury found none. Next, mercury vapor tests of the daycare where he spent his days occurred. Bingo: the tests found mercury levels 90 times the safe level.

Turns out the daycare owner bought an antique blood pressure cuff for the children to play with. They did not realize that it contained mercury. A few weeks later, daycare staff removed the cuff from the play area after the children pulled the device apart. They did not know the health risk. Exposure to mercury continued until the Florida Department of Environmental Protection tested the daycare months later.

The U.S. Environment Protection Agency (EPA) and local contractors removed the spilled mercury from the daycare. They removed the carpet, carpet pads, and other household items containing small beads of silvery mercury. They cleaned the floors and aired out the house. Once the levels of mercury vapor dropped, the daycare reopened.

Tests for mercury of the daycare parents' cars showed none, resulting in no need for further tests of any of their homes.

Twenty-three people were tested for mercury. Sixteen had elevated levels and nine required treatment.

Mercury Poisoning Can Make a Child:

- Feel anxious or tired
- Not feel hungry
- Have memory problems
- Have trouble hearing
- Tremble or shake

Pregnant women should avoid mercury because it can harm the development of their unborn babies. It can also affect newborns through breast milk. Children may have problems with their nervous or digestive system. Mercury can also cause kidney damage.

Some adults recall playing with liquid mercury when they were kids. That was back when mercury's dangers were not yet fully known. Now scientists understand that this form of mercury is very toxic.

Consider using non-mercury alternatives, like digital thermometers. Not having mercury around is the best spill prevention.



Liquid Mercury Health Notice!

Daycares Must Avoid Liquid Mercury Spills

Liquid (or elemental) mercury is shiny and silver. It is also known as metallic mercury. Sometimes people call it "quicksilver" because of how it looks.

Old-fashioned glass thermometers contain liquid mercury. So do some older wall-mounted blood pressure cuffs (above). **Do not keep these devices in your home or child care environment!** Being aware of the dangers of liquid mercury can help keep the children in your care safe!

Just using a product that contains liquid mercury does not harm your health. But if the product breaks, the mercury that spills out is a poison. When mercury spills, it looks like silver beads. It can break up into tiny drops that can hide in small spaces, like cracks in the floor. These drops release harmful vapors (fumes). **Drops of mercury can last for years if not cleaned up properly.** They continue to give off fumes for years. People can keep breathing mercury fumes from a spill, harming their health even more over time.

Mercury Damages the Brain

Even a small amount of liquid mercury can harm the health of children because their bodies are small. This is why children should never play with liquid mercury. They also should not be around where it has spilled. Mercury vapors are invisible. They also have no odor. Breathing these vapors can make a child very sick.

Learn More

Visit: www.atsdr.cdc.gov/dontmesswithmercury/

Mercury Spills: Find clean-up steps for mercury spills at: www.floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/mercury-spills/index.html

Call: 850-245-4250 or contact your local county health department.

Touched or Breathed in Mercury? Call your doctor right away, or call the Florida Poison Information Center at 1-800-222-1222. Medical staff are available 24/7.

Recycle: Call 1-800-741-4337 or visit www.dep.state.fl.us/waste/categories/mercury/pages/publications.htm