

Questions & Sample Answers

ECHO-TV Show #18 “What’s Fishy About Mercury?”

(Taping Date: Tuesday, April 25th, 2006 / 3:00-8:00 pm-TPT)

NED – 1, 3, 8 preference. No need to add questions – just elaborate on the info.

1. What is mercury and where does it come from?

Answer:

- Mercury is a naturally occurring mineral found in the earth's crust. It is present in coal and metal ores. When coal is burned to generate electricity, the mercury is released.
- Mercury also comes from taconite mines where iron ore is harvested to make steel for buildings.
- We benefit from mercury because it's used in household items like fluorescent light bulbs, computer screens, thermostats and more.

2. Mercury has many uses but why should we be concerned about mercury?

Answer:

- Too much exposure to mercury can be toxic (harmful) to our health. It's especially harmful to babies, young children and pregnant women.
- We are now finding that the most common way that mercury gets into our body is from eating fish.

3. How does mercury get in the fish we eat?

Answer:

- Most of the mercury that pollutes our air and water comes from power plants burning coal and the wind carries this pollutant across states and Countries.
- When people throw away items that contain mercury like thermometers, the chemical ends up in our land, rivers and lakes causing our fish to be contaminated.

4. How can mercury affect our health?

Answer:

- Exposure to some mercury will happen because it's a natural part of our environment but too much exposure to mercury can cause harm to kidneys and other organs or affect our central nervous system.
- Most people at risk are pregnant mothers, nursing or breast-fed babies, and young children because exposure to mercury is harmful to a young, developing nervous system.

5. What are the types of fish that have less mercury than others?

Answer:

- All fish whether we caught it in the river or lake, bought it in the market or ordered fish in a restaurant have some mercury in them.
- In general, big and older fish have more mercury in them compared to smaller fish like sunfish and crappies.

6. To avoid mercury, should we simply not eat fish? (Pat Would like to spend more time on this subject...)

Answer:

- Eating fish is a healthy part of our diet because it's low fat and a good source of protein that may reduce the risk of some illnesses.
- For most people, 1 – 2 meals of fish per week is enough to balance the health benefits and the risk of eating contaminants in fish.
- In addition to eating fish, other sources of protein are healthy for your diet including meats, poultry, pork, nuts and tofu.

7. How can we reduce our exposure to mercury when eating fish?

Answer:

- The bigger the fish the more mercury in the fish so eat small, young fish that will naturally have less contaminants in them.
- You can't remove mercury in fish by cleaning or cooking it away but you can remove other pollutants found in fish by cutting away the fat.
- Know what kinds of fish in your area are more likely to carry mercury and limit how much of those kinds of fish from your diet.

8. What is the best way to keep mercury out of our lakes and rivers?

Answer:

- Never throw away household items that contain mercury like thermometers, fluorescent light bulbs and computers in the trash because the garbage may end up in rivers, lakes and fish.
- Take items that contain mercury to special places called "household hazardous waste sites". These sites collect chemicals found in paints, motor oil and mercury made items and stores them safely away from land, air and water.
- Local county agencies can tell you where to find household hazardous waste sites near your home.
- Use less energy! Turn off the lights!

9. Where can we learn more about mercury in fish and mercury found in household products?

Answer:

- Local and State health departments can tell you where to properly dispose of mercury made items.
- Many areas have pollution control agencies that monitor pollutants.
- The ECHO web site lists resources for Minnesota including the Department of Health, Pollution Control agency and the Department of Natural resources.
- FISH ADVISORIES www.dnr.state.mn.us (Pat McCann will elaborate)

10. Is there anything else you think we should know on this topic?

Answer:

- Most often mercury comes from plants burning coal to make electricity or from taconite mines where iron is collected to make steel products.
- Mercury pollutants are carried in the air we breathe and end up in our land, water and fish.
- Too much mercury can damage the central nervous system especially in the fetuses of pregnant mothers and children under 15.
- It's okay to eat fish as long as you limit yourself to species with low levels of mercury and eat 1 or 2 meals a week.