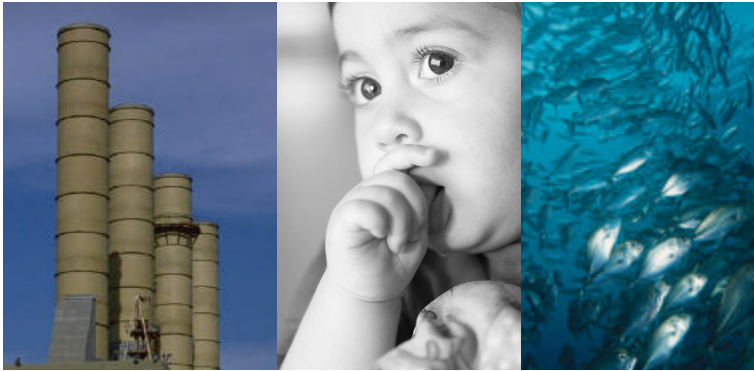


Mercury Pollution: Children in Danger!



Children Exposed to Unsafe Mercury Levels Even Before Birth

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) scientists estimate that every year in the United States as many as 630,000 developing children may be exposed to unsafe levels of mercury in their mother's blood.

Children exposed to even low levels of mercury before birth can experience developmental delays and lifelong damage to fine motor function, language, visual-spatial abilities and memory.

Elemental mercury is best known for its use in fever thermometers. It is also found in batteries, fluorescent lamps, barometers, dental amalgams, switches, and medical devices such as blood pressure gauges.

However, most of the mercury in our environment is omitted from industrial smoke stacks.

The EPA has concluded that coal-fired power plants are the nation's largest source of mercury emissions. Other major sources include mining, smelting, and waste incineration.

All forms of mercury are poisonous to humans. A spectrum of health effects have been observed following exposure, with the severity of effects depending largely on the amount and timing of exposure.

The developing fetus and young children are most sensitive to the effects of mercury exposure, even at low levels. The developing nervous system and brain are highly sensitive to mercury in any form, but particularly to methyl-mercury and mercury vapors. Maternal exposure to organic mercury may lead to brain damage, mental retardation, poor coordination, speech difficulties and other serious effects on the fetus and newborn. These effects can be seen even when the exposed mother exhibits no symptoms of mercury poisoning.

In addition to exposure in utero, infants and children ingest methyl-mercury from breast milk and other foods in their diet. Young children and infants are potentially more susceptible to neuro-toxicity from methyl-mercury than older children and adults because the brain continues to grow and develop dramatically for the first several years of life. Children also may have higher exposures than adults pound for pound, because a child eats more food relative to his or her body weight than an adult does. As a result, they may have higher exposure and thus higher risk than adults do.

Once released to the environment, mercury contaminates the food chain and poses a danger to wildlife and human health. Airborne mercury eventually deposits in water sources where it is converted to methyl-mercury. Highly toxic methyl-mercury accumulates in many edible fish species, which are a major source of human mercury exposure in the United State. Methyl-mercury can cross the placenta and enter the fetal brain causing damage to the unborn child.

According to an EPA report issued in 2003, mercury contamination in fish across the United States is so pervasive that health departments in 45 states have issued fish consumption advisories. In addition, 11 states have also issued advisories urging women and children to limit consumption of canned tuna. The United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention has reported one in 12 women have unsafe levels of mercury in their bodies for a fetus.

According to a General Health Advisory issued by the New York State Health Department, a person should eat no more than one meal (one-half pound) per week of fish taken from New York State's freshwaters and some marine waters at the mouth of the Hudson River (although the general advisory does not apply to most marine waters).

Information Source: Physicians for Social Responsibility: Environment and Health Program.

For more information on mercury pollution and its effects please visit the following Web sites:

www.mercuryaction.org

www.envirohealthaction.org

www.cleanairnow.org



393 Delaware Avenue
Delmar, New York 12054
Phone: 518-439-8311:
E-mail: nysarc@nysarc.org
Web site: www.nysarc.org