

The Harmful Effects of Mercury



Mercury can build up in the body over time. It may take months or years of regularly eating contaminated fish to accumulate levels which are a health concern. By following the fish advisory, the amount of mercury a person ingests is safely eliminated between meals. Too much mercury intake may harm the nervous system. Small amounts of mercury can damage a brain that is beginning to form or grow; therefore, young children, developing fetuses and breast-fed babies are at the highest risk. Excessive mercury may affect a child's behavior and thought processes later in life.

Mercury can also harm older children and adults; however, larger exposures of mercury are necessary for symptoms to arise. The first symptoms of adult mercury poisoning include incoordination and burning or tingling sensation in the fingers and toes. As mercury levels increase, the ability to walk, talk, see, and hear may be affected in subtle ways.

To avoid the harmful effects of mercury, DEQ advises that people follow the suggestions outlined in the Mercury in Fish booklet.

Mercury in Fish Advisory booklet