



EHS Fact Sheet

Mercury

Liquid mercury identification

Mercury is the only metal that is liquid at room temperature. It is a heavy, viscous, odorless liquid that is bright silver-white in color. Beads, droplets, and puddles can often be identified by their spherical shape.



Common uses

- Thermometers
- Wall thermostats
- Compact fluorescent light bulbs
- Barometers
- Other scientific equipment

Hazards

- Mercury can be extremely poisonous to humans.
- Mercury most commonly enters the body by breathing the airborne vapors but can also enter the body through an open wound or by ingesting it.
- Mercury may have toxic effects on the nervous, digestive, and immune systems; and on lungs, kidneys, skin, and eyes.
- Indoors, mercury vapors will accumulate over time.
- Mercury can break into tiny droplets when spilled. The droplets spread easily and can build up in tiny cracks and spaces.

Where mercury can be found

- In current and past lab spaces.
- Any area where it has been previously used.
- On floors, behind and under lab furniture, inside cabinets, in chemical fume hoods, in lab sinks, floor drains, and under floor tiles.

What to do after a spill

- ✓ Have everyone else leave the area.
- ✓ Do not let anyone walk through the mercury on their way out of the area.
- ✓ Open all windows and doors to the outside.
- ✓ Shut all doors to other parts of the building.
- ✓ Call EHS as soon as possible, 744-7241

What NEVER to do after a spill

- × Never use a vacuum to clean up mercury.
- × Never use a broom to try and sweep up mercury.
- × Never pour mercury down a drain.
- × Never walk around if your shoes might be contaminated with mercury.
- × Never attempt to clean up mercury with bare hands.