



# Poison HOTLINE

Partnership between UnityPoint Health and  
University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics

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*Did you know .....*

Compact Fluorescent Light (CFL) bulbs contain a very small amount of mercury. A mercury thermometer contains about 500 mg mercury and in comparison a CFL contains approximately 4 mg of mercury (less than 1/100<sup>th</sup> of the amount in a mercury thermometer). No mercury is released when the CFL bulbs are intact or in use. Use caution when handling CFLs in order not to break the bulb as breakage can release mercury vapor.

Check with your local government about disposal requirements. Some communities require CFLs (broken or unbroken) be taken to a local recycling center for disposal.

## Mercury Thermometer Clean-Up

The mercury found in a thermometer is elemental mercury and severe toxicity from elemental mercury is unusual. Toxicity results from vaporization of mercury and then breathing in the fumes. Short-term exposure to mercury vapor may harm the nervous system of unborn babies, infants and children. Chronic exposure to mercury vapor can cause irritability, tremors, memory loss, respiratory and eye irritation, chest pain, hypertension and kidney damage.

### Mercury Thermometer Clean-Up Instructions

#### What NOT to do

- DO NOT try to sweep or vacuum up the mercury.
- DO NOT pour mercury down a drain.
- DO NOT wash clothing that came in direct contact with mercury in the washing machine.
- DO NOT walk around if your shoes might be contaminated with mercury.

#### What to do when a Mercury Thermometer breaks

- Have children, pets and other people leave the area. Open windows and doors to the outside. Shut doors that lead to other parts of the house.
- Mercury can be easily cleaned up if on wood, linoleum, tile or any similar, hard and smooth surface.
- If mercury is spilled on carpet, curtains, upholstery or other absorbent surfaces, these items should be thrown away. Cut and remove only the affected portion of the contaminated carpet or upholstery for disposal.
- Clean up procedure:
  1. Wear rubber or latex gloves
  2. Double bag broken pieces of glass in zip lock. Wrap in paper towel first.
  3. Use stiff paper or an eye dropper to pick up larger pieces. Use packing or duct tape to pick up the remaining smaller pieces. Place this mercury into the zip lock bag and seal the bag securely.
  4. Take to a Household Hazardous Materials Regional Collection Center.
  5. Keep the area well ventilated for 24 hours after the clean-up. Continue to keep pets and children out of the area.
  6. For complete mercury clean up recommendations, call the Iowa Poison Center at **800-222-1222**.

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Certified Specialist in Poison Information*

**POISON**  
**Help**  
**1-800-222-1222**

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