

# Selling mercury cosmetics and pharmaceuticals

## Mercury-containing skin lightening creams, lotions, soaps, ointments, lozenges, pharmaceuticals and antiseptics

Mercury is a toxic element that was used in some cosmetic, pharmaceutical, and antiseptic products due to its unique properties and is now being phased out of most uses. The offer, sale, or distribution of mercury-containing products is regulated in Minnesota by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

Anyone offering a mercury-containing product for sale or donation in Minnesota is subject to these requirements, whether a private citizen, collector, non-profit organization, or business. Offers and sales through any method are regulated, whether in a store or shop, classified advertisement, flea market, or online. If a mercury-containing product is located in Minnesota, it is regulated, regardless of where a purchaser is located.

Note: This fact sheet discusses the requirements and restrictions of the MPCA. Cosmetics and pharmaceuticals may also be regulated for sale whether they contain mercury or not by other state or federal agencies, including the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy and the U.S. Food & Drug Administration. See [More information](#) on page 2.

## What are the risks of using mercury-containing products?

Use of mercury-containing products can damage the brain, kidneys, and liver. Children and pregnant women are at increased risk. For more information about the risks of mercury exposure, visit the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). See [More information](#) on the page 2.

If you believe you have been exposed to a mercury-containing product, contact your health care provider or the Minnesota Poison Control Center at 800-222-1222. See [More information](#) on the page 2.

## How can I tell if a product contains mercury and whether I can sell it?

Mercury and mercury compounds may be found in products under many different common ingredient names. [Table 1](#) on the next page lists mercury compound ingredient names used in cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. If a product lists any of these ingredients, assume it contains mercury.

[Table 2](#) then lists other common indicators of mercury-containing cosmetics and pharmaceutical products and Minnesota's requirements for sales of each category.

Items containing liquid mercury, such as thermometers, thermostats, switches, sphygmomanometers (blood pressure gauges), fishing lures, and plumb bobs, are regulated for sale separately in Minnesota. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw4- 26, Selling Mercury Items, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw4-26.pdf>.

Lamps that contain mercury in gaseous form, including fluorescent lamps, neon lamps, and high-intensity discharge (HID) lamps, are regulated for sale in Minnesota under a different set of requirements. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw4- 21, Selling Fluorescent Lamps, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw4-21.pdf>.

## How can I properly dispose of mercury-containing products?

Mercury-containing products must be properly disposed as hazardous waste and **may not be placed into solid waste**. Households should contact their county of residence to find their local Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection program. Businesses may contact their regional Very Small Quantity Generator (VSQG) hazardous waste collection program. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw2-51, VSQG collection programs, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw2-51.pdf>.

**Table 1. Mercury ingredient compound names and synonyms used in cosmetics and pharmaceuticals**

anhydro-para-hydroxy-mercuri-meta-cresol	mercurescein	merodicein
aseptichrome	mercuric	merthiolate*
brocasept	mercuric (bichloride/iodide/oxide)	mertorgan
calomel	mercuri-meta-cresol	merzonin
cinfacromin	mercurin	metaphen
cinnabar	mercurio	nitromersol
corona-merc	mercurius solubilis	para-chlor-mercuri-phenol
corrosive sublimate	mercurius sublimatus	parahydrecin
ethylmercury sodium	mercurius vivus	phenyl mercuric (benzoate/nitrate)
hydragyrum (hydrargyrum)	mercurochrome*	quicksilver
hydrarg. chlor.	mercuroply	red precipitate
hydroxymercurifluorescein	mercurothiolate	sodium ethylmercurisaliclylate
interchrome	mercurous chloride	supercrome
meralein (sodium)	mercury (ammoniated/bichloride)	thimerosal
merbromin(e)	mercresin	thiomersal(an)
mercolized	merfamin	

\*Note: Mercurochrome™ and Merthiolate™ are now marketed as brand names under new mercury-free formulations. These new products are clearly marked 'mercury free' and are allowed to be sold in Minnesota.

**Table 2. Potential mercury-containing cosmetics, pharmaceutical products, and Minnesota sale requirements**

Product	Potential indicators of mercury content	Sale conditions
Skin lighteners, whiteners, bleaches, blemish removers and anti-aging creams, lotions, and soaps	Any ingredient names listed in <a href="#">Table 1</a> . Ingredients only in language other than English or no ingredients listed.  Any product listed in the most recent update of the MDH's publication, Skin lightening products found to contain mercury, hydroquinone and/or steroids, available on the MDH's website. See <a href="#">More information</a> below.	All offer and sales prohibited if mercury greater than one part per million (>1 ppm)
Homeopathic medications	Any ingredient names listed in <a href="#">Table 1</a> at dilutions of 6X or less or dilutions of 4C or less.  Note: Products containing <a href="#">Table 1</a> ingredients at dilutions of 9X or greater and 5C or greater contain less than the regulated threshold of mercury and are allowed to be sold in Minnesota.	All offer and sales prohibited if mercury greater than two parts per billion (>2 ppb)
Vintage: - antiseptic - balm - eye drops - eyewash (collyrium) - germicide - lozenges - medicated bandages - ointment - salve	Any ingredient names listed in <a href="#">Table 1</a> .  Commonly found in vintage first aid kits, snakebite kits, pharmacy & 'medicine cabinet' collections.  Common vintage product brand names containing mercury: Alulotion; Black and White Ointment; Calotabs; Corona Ointment; CRC Compound; Handi-Snips; Kal-O-Lax; Kip Ointment; Mansfield's Capillaris; McConnon Skin Salve; Mercuroply; MercuroStik; Neko Soap; Novocell; Palmer's Skin Success; Prof. Field's Powders; Pyrol; Ray-tabs; Rawleigh's Medicated Ointment; Sanette; Thantis Lozenges; Triloids; Unguentine; Wonderful Dream Brand Salve (W.D.S.); X.E.M. Salve; Zip-Strips	All offer and sales prohibited if mercury greater than two parts per billion (>2 ppb)

## More information

Guidance and requirements in this fact sheet were compiled from Minn. Stat. ch. 116, and incorporate decisions made by the MPCA on May 18, 2011, and November 21, 2017. Visit the Office of the Revisor of Statutes at <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/> to review Minnesota Statutes.

### Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Toll free (all offices) .....800-657-3864  
All offices.....651-296-6300  
..... <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

### Minnesota Poison Control

Toll free ..... 800-222-1222  
..... <https://www.poison.org/>

### Minnesota Duty Officer

Toll free ..... 800-422-0798  
Metro .....651-649-5451

### Minnesota Board of Pharmacy

All offices.....651-201-2825  
..... <https://mn.gov/boards/pharmacy/>

### Minnesota Department of Health

Toll free (all offices)..... 888-345-0823  
All offices.....651-201-5000  
..... <http://www.health.state.mn.us/>

### U.S. Food & Drug Administration

Toll free (all offices).....888-463-6332  
..... <https://www.fda.gov/>