

Selling Mercury Cosmetics & Pharmaceuticals

Mercury-containing skin lightening creams, lotions, and soaps, mercury-based homeopathic pharmaceuticals, and mercury antiseptics

Mercury is a toxic element that was historically 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 the next page.

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 at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/>. See [More information](#) on the next page.

If you believe you have been exposed to a mercury-containing product, contact your health care provider or the Minnesota Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 or visit <https://www.poison.org/>.

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

[Table 1](#) on the next page lists common indicators of mercury-containing cosmetics and pharmaceutical products and Minnesota's requirements.

Items containing liquid mercury, such as thermometers, barometers, thermostats, switches, sphygmomanometers (blood pressure gauges), fishing lures, wheel balancers, pendulums, and plumb bobs, are also regulated for sale 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?

Households may contact their local Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) program. Find your local HHW program at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/living-green/find-your-household-hazardous-waste-collection-site>.

Businesses must manage mercury-containing products as hazardous wastes. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw1-06, Treat or Dispose of Hazardous Waste, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw1-06.pdf>.

Table 1. Common mercury-containing cosmetics and 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	Ingredients include the words: <i>calomel</i> , <i>cinnabar</i> , <i>mercury</i> , <i>mercurio</i> , or <i>mercurous chloride</i> . Ingredients in language other than English. No ingredients listed.	All offer and sales prohibited if mercury greater than one part per million (>1 ppm)
Homeopathic medications	Ingredients include the words: <i>mercurius solubilis</i> , <i>mercurius sublimatus</i> , or <i>mercurius vivus</i> at dilutions of 3X to 6X and 3C to 4C. Note: products containing these ingredients at dilutions of 9X to 30X and 5C to 30C 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 antiseptics, disinfectants, eyedrops, eyewash (collyrium), ointments, and swabs	Commonly found in vintage first aid kits, snake bite kits, and pharmacopeia. Ingredients include the words: <i>aseptichrome</i> , <i>brocsept</i> , <i>cinfacromin</i> , <i>merbromin(e)</i> , <i>mercurescein</i> , <i>mercurochrome*</i> , <i>merfammin</i> , <i>merthiolate*</i> , <i>mertorgan</i> , <i>merzonin</i> , <i>metaphen</i> , <i>nitromersol</i> , <i>parahydracin</i> , <i>sodium ethylmercurisalicylate</i> , <i>supercrome</i> , <i>thimerosal</i> , or <i>thiomersal</i> . *Note: Mercurochrome™ and Merthiolate™ are now marketed under new mercury-free formulations. These new products are clearly marked 'mercury free' and are allowed to be sold in Minnesota.	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 Minnesota Statutes, 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/pubs> to review Minnesota Statutes.

Contact the MPCA with questions. Immediately report all mercury spills to the Minnesota Duty Officer.

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Toll free (all offices) 1-800-657-3864
All offices 651-296-6300
..... <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

Minnesota Poison Control

Toll free 1-800-222-1222
..... <https://www.poison.org/>

Minnesota Duty Officer

Toll free 1-800-422-0798
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) 1-888-345-0823
All offices 651-201-5000
..... <http://www.health.state.mn.us/>

U.S. Food & Drug Administration

Toll free (all offices) 1-888-463-6332
..... <https://www.fda.gov/>