

# Selling mercury cosmetics and pharmaceuticals

## Mercury-containing skin lightening creams, lotions, soaps, ointments, lozenges, pharmaceuticals and 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 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. 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 1-800-222-1222. 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 and brand names. [Table 1](#) on the next page lists mercury compound names used in cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. If a product lists any of these names, 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?

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

anhydro-para-hydroxy-mercuri-meta-cresol	mercurescein	merodicein
aseptichrome	mercuric	merthiolate*
brocasept	mercuri-meta-cresol	mertorgan
calomel	mercurio	merzonin
cinfacromin	mercurius solubilis	metaphen
cinnabar	mercurius sublimatus	nitromersol
corona-merc	mercurius vivus	para-chlor-mercuri-phenol
corrosive sublimate	mercurochrome*	parahydrecin
ethylmercury sodium	mercuroply	phenyl mercuric
hydragyrum	mercurothiolate	quicksilver
hydroxymercurifluorescein	mercurous chloride	sodium ethylmercurisalicylate
interchrome	mercury	supercrome
meralein	mercesin	thimerosal
merbromin(e)	merfamin	thiomersal(an)
mercolized		

\*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 Table 1. Ingredients only in language other than English or no ingredients listed.	All offer and sales prohibited if mercury greater than one part per million (>1 ppm)
Homeopathic medications	Any ingredient names listed in Table 1 at dilutions of 6X or less or dilutions of 4C or less. Note: Products containing Table 1 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 antiseptics, disinfectants, and germicidal/germicides	Any ingredient names listed in Table 1. Commonly found in vintage first aid kits, snakebite kits, pharmacy, and 'medicine cabinet' collections.	All offer and sales prohibited if mercury greater than two parts per billion (>2 ppb)
Vintage bandages	Any ingredient names listed in Table 1.	All offer and sales prohibited if mercury in bandage pad greater than two parts per billion (>2 ppb)
Vintage eye drops and eyewash (collyrium)	Any ingredient names listed in Table 1.	All offer and sales prohibited if mercury greater than two parts per billion (>2 ppb)
Vintage lozenges	Any ingredient names listed in Table 1.	All offer and sales prohibited if mercury greater than two parts per billion (>2 ppb)
Vintage ointments, salves, and balms	Any ingredient names listed in Table 1. May include brand names: Corona, Rawleigh's, Unguentine	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) ..... 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/>