



County of Sacramento

METHYL MERCURY IN SKIN CREAMS HEALTH ALERT

September 9, 2019

Situational Update

A Sacramento County resident remains hospitalized in a semi-comatose state after using a skin cream for removing spots and wrinkles purchased through informal networks from Mexico that had been adulterated with methyl mercury. This is the first time this **extremely dangerous** form of mercury has been found in a face cream in the United States, though (mercurous chloride or calomel) mercury poisoning from skin creams used for skin lightening, acne treatment, and fading age spots and blemishes imported from Mexico have previously occurred. Mercury contamination can also cause severe illness among household contacts, especially in pregnant and breastfeeding women and children. Please see actions requested of clinicians below.

Actions Requested of Clinicians:

1. **Consider** mercury poisoning in persons exposed to skin creams purchased from Mexico and present with the following signs and symptoms:

| General Signs and Symptoms | Children with prolonged exposure |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty concentrating, memory loss• Nervousness, irritability, anxiety• Depression, insomnia• Headaches• Weight loss, fatigue• Tremors, numbness or tingling in hands, feet, or around the lips | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pink hands and feet• Skin flaking• Excessive saliva or thirst, gum disease• Irritability, poor appetite• Poor muscle tone, leg cramps• High blood pressure, rash |

2. **Collect** jars of skin cream from patients exhibiting signs and symptoms of mercury poisoning and provide to Sacramento County Public Health (SCPH) for testing. Ensure that the jars are placed in Ziploc bags.
3. **Collect** blood and urine for mercury testing. Contact SCPH at (916) 875-5881 for more information.
4. **Report** any suspected cases to SCPH **immediately** by phone at (916) 875-5881. Provide medical records (e.g. history and physical, discharge summary, labs) via CalREDIE or confidential fax at (916) 854-9709.

For information about mercury poisoning linked to skin creams:

- See the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Health Alert at https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDCPHP/DEODC/EHIB/CPE/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Mercury%20in%20Skin%20Creams_HealthAlert%202019.pdf
- Contact California Poison Control at (800) 222-1222
- Contact CDPH's Environmental Health Investigations Branch: Leave a message at (510) 981-4354, email AskEHIB@cdph.ca.gov, or visit the Mercury in Skin Cream website at <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDCPHP/DEODC/EHIB/CPE/Pages/MercuryinSkinCream.aspx>
- See SCPH's website at <http://www.dhs.saccounty.net/PUB/Pages/Mercury-in-Skin-Creams.aspx>
- Contact SCPH at (916) 875-5881.

Sincerely,



Olivia Kasirye, MD, MS
Public Health Officer