Cleaning Up Mercury Spills in the Home

What should I do if there is a metallic (elemental) mercury spill in my home?

You can clean up small mercury spills in your home (for example, if a thermometer breaks). If a larger amount of mercury spills in your home, call 311 to report the spill and to get guidance on clean-up.

For any size spill, first take these steps:

- Keep people, especially children, away from the spill
- Open windows to ventilate the room
- Avoid spreading mercury around the home

To clean up a small spill:

- Use these materials for the cleanup: stiff paper (e.g. index cards), sticky tape, wet paper towels, plastic bags that seal, and a flashlight. Use disposable gloves if you have them.
- Never use a vacuum or broom to clean up the spill. Vacuums and brooms can spread the mercury around the home and increase mercury vapor in the air.
- Remove jewelry before clean-up (mercury can ruin jewelry).
- Mercury spills on carpets, rugs, upholstery or floors with cracks are more difficult to clean up and may require professional cleaning services.
- Carefully pick up any broken glass, wrap the ends with tape and put into a plastic bag.
- Scoop up larger droplets using stiff paper and place in plastic bag.
- Use the sticky tape or wet papertowels to pick up smaller mercury droplets.
- Shine a flashlight around the area to find any droplets that you may have missed. When the area looks clean, wipe down with wet paper towels.
- Place mercury droplets into a plastic bag along with any other materials you used to clean up the spill. Seal all waste in a single bag.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Call 311 and ask for the Department of Sanitation to find out how to dispose of the mercury. Do not put mercury down a sink, a drain, in the toilet or in the regular garbage.

If a larger amount of mercury spills in your home, call 311 to report the spill.

Do I need a medical test if there is a mercury spill in my home?

If you clean up a small mercury spill quickly, you do not need to be tested for mercury exposure. After a larger spill, you and your doctor may decide that you should be tested. A urine sample is used to test for metallic (elemental) mercury exposure. The New York State Department of Health will contact you if your urine mercury level is elevated (at or above 20 micrograms per liter) and will talk with you about how to lower your level.