
Mercury in Skin-Lightening Lotions

To: Health Care Providers, Hospitals, and Ambulatory Care Centers
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– Please Distribute Widely –

The Vermont Department of Health is aware that some skin-lightening lotions may contain inorganic mercury. So far, at least six states have reported elevated mercury levels in people exposed to mercury-containing lotions. No reports of mercury-containing lotions have been recorded in Vermont.

Lotions containing mercury are not allowed for sale in the U.S., but many such lotions are manufactured abroad and sent into the U.S. undetected. Many of these lotions are sold in specialty ethnic stores, and may be labeled in a language other than English. Mercury may be listed under the ingredients section as “mercurous chloride,” “calomel,” “mercuric,” “mercurio,” or “mercury.”

Signs and symptoms of mercury poisoning include:

- Irritability
- Shyness
- Tremors
- Changes in vision or hearing
- Memory problems
- Depression
- Numbness and tingling in hands, feet, or around the mouth

If you suspect mercury exposure from skin-lightening lotions, please contact the Health Department at 1-800-439-8550 as well as the Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222.

FDA’s warning on mercury-containing lotions:

<http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm294849.htm> (exit VDH)

EPA’s summary of the health effects of inorganic mercury:

www.epa.gov/teach/chem_summ/mercury_inorg_summary.pdf (exit VDH)