



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Michelle Morse, MD, PhD
Acting Commissioner

2025 Health Advisory # 2: Elevated Concentrations of Mercury in Skin Lightening Creams

Please distribute to clinical staff in dermatology, neurology, nephrology, obstetrics & gynecology, primary care, internal medicine, family medicine and emergency medicine.

February 4, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

The NYC Health Department recently found [22 skin lightening creams](#) purchased over-the-counter in NYC that contain mercury up to 30,000 times the allowable limit for mercury in cosmetics. These products claim to lighten, whiten or brighten the skin, or remove freckles, spots, marks, acne, under-eye circles and wrinkles.

The mercury from these types of products applied topically can be absorbed by the skin. The mercury can also vaporize, accumulate in indoor air, and be directly transferred to clothing, bedding and towels, leading to potential dermal and inhalational exposures.

These types of products are more likely to contain the inorganic form of mercury, though some may contain organic mercury, which is the type of mercury commonly found in fish. People with mercury toxicity may initially be asymptomatic, but repeated and/or chronic exposures can result in a skin rash, paresthesias, tremors, irritability, memory loss and depression. Renal effects from mercury toxicity may manifest clinically as proteinuria, acute tubular necrosis or nephrotic syndrome.

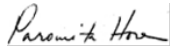
Assess Potential Exposures

- Consider inorganic mercury exposure from skin lightening products when conducting workup for renal, dermatologic, and neurologic diseases.
- Advise people to stop or avoid using non-prescription skin-lightening products known to contain mercury that are listed in [Hazardous Products: Mercury in Soaps and Creams](#).

- Consider ordering a mercury blood and urine test for people who report using these types of products or who have signs and/or symptoms of mercury toxicity. Urine testing can include either a spot urine mercury concentration or a 24-hour urine mercury concentration.
- Report known or suspected mercury poisoning to the NYC Poison Center 24/7 at (212) POISONS (764-7667); interpretation is available for people who speak languages other than English.
- Review NYC Health Department Medical Management Guidelines for [Mercury](#).

Thank you for helping us keep New Yorkers healthy.

Sincerely,



Paromita Hore, PhD, MPH
Director, Environmental Exposure Assessment and Education



Mark K Su, MD, MPH
Director, New York City Poison Center