What is Mercury Poisoning

Mercury poisoning is the ill effects on humans nervous system and other bodily systems due to the over-exposure of mercury. Mercury is a neurotoxin, meaning it affects the nervous system. The "mad hatters" of the 19th century suffered from mercury poisoning which caused personality changes, nervousness, trembling, and even dementia. The hatters were exposed to mercury in the felting process, where mercury was rubbed onto cloth to preserve it.

Today, people are more aware of the dangers of mercury and many of its uses have been discontinued. However, mercury exposure is still an occupational hazard for people in many industries and mercury is present in the environment around us. There is also the risk of exposure due to a thermometer breaking or mercury leaking out of a thermostat or any number of mercury-containing devices. If mercury vapor is inhaled, as much as 80 percent may enter the bloodstream.

The effects of mercury poisoning can be classified as:

- acute
- chronic, or
- other

The degree of risk varies depending on the amount of mercury, the form, how often, and the age of the exposed person. Children (and also unborn fetuses) are the most vulnerable the the effects of mercury poisoning.

The work environment can be designed to minimize workers’ exposure. But some mercury will still escape into the environment and much of it will change into methylmercury and eventually be eaten by fish. Mercury-contaminated fish are the most likely source of mercury poisoning. It is recommended that mercury's uses in buildings be eliminated, not because its presence makes the buildings dangerous, but to help keep mercury out of the environment.