

# Mercury (Blood)



## Does this test have other names?

Hg level

## What is this test?

This test measures the amount of mercury in your blood.

Mercury is a heavy metal that can be toxic. There are three different forms of mercury and each type can produce different symptoms if taken internally by eating it or breathing its vapors, or if absorbed through the skin. It exists naturally as a liquid at room temperature and as an odorless vapor.

You can be exposed to mercury from polluted air or water. You can also be exposed if you work in an industry that still uses mercury, from eating fish that are high in mercury, and from some complementary and alternative health remedies.

Long-term exposure to mercury can cause kidney and brain damage in adults. Exposure to mercury during pregnancy can cause permanent damage to the developing fetus. Breastfeeding may also expose infants to mercury.

Children who are exposed to mercury can suffer damage to their kidneys, nervous system, and digestive system.

Mercury is also in silver amalgam dental fillings. Tiny amounts of mercury may be absorbed from these fillings, but this amount is not likely to cause health problems.

## Why do I need this test?

You may need this test if your healthcare provider suspects that you have mercury poisoning. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Cough
- Chest tightness or pain
- Shortness of breath

Inhaling mercury can cause:

- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Burning sensation in your mouth
- Hand tremors
- Problems sleeping

You may also need this test to monitor your safety if it's possible that you could be exposed to mercury at your work.

You may also have this test if you are pregnant or breastfeeding and have been exposed to high levels of mercury.

## **What other tests might I have along with this test?**

Your healthcare provider may also order tests of your urine or breast milk to measure for mercury. A sample of hair from your scalp may also be tested to measure mercury exposure.

## **What do my test results mean?**

Test results may vary depending on your age, gender, health history, and other things. Your test results may be different depending on the lab used. They may not mean you have a problem. Ask your healthcare provider what your test results mean for you.

The results of this test are given in micrograms per liter (mcg/L). Normally levels are 10 mcg/L or less. Having some mercury in your blood does not mean you will develop health problems.

## **How is this test done?**

The test is done with a blood sample. A needle is used to draw blood from a vein in your arm or hand.

## **Does this test pose any risks?**

Having a blood test with a needle carries some risks. These include bleeding, infection, bruising, and feeling lightheaded. When the needle pricks your arm or hand, you may feel a slight sting or pain. Afterward, the site may be sore.

## **What might affect my test results?**

Certain Chinese herbal products or skin-lightening creams that contain mercury can cause your blood level to rise. Eating fish and shellfish that contain high levels of mercury can also raise your mercury levels.

## **How do I get ready for this test?**

You don't need to prepare for this test. Be sure your healthcare provider knows about all medicines, herbs, vitamins, and supplements you take. This includes medicines that don't need a prescription and any illegal drugs you may use.

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