

Women & Children Under Threat

Global Study Finds High Levels of Mercury in Women of Reproductive Age

IPEN Minamata COP1 Study Finds Mercury in Skin Creams

Elevated Mercury in Women of Childbearing Age Across Global Regions

Mercury has been found in high levels across all global regions in women of reproductive age, according to a [new study](#) conducted by [IPEN](#) (a global public health & environment network) and the [Biodiversity Research Institute](#) (BRI), an accredited mercury laboratory. **Hair sampling of women in the Pacific Islands and in gold mining communities in Indonesia, Kenya, and Myanmar revealed a mercury body burden many times higher than US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) health advisory levels.**

Key Findings:

- In the Pacific Islands, far from all industrial mercury sources, 85.7% of women tested exceeded the US EPA 1 ppm threshold level, with most measuring **three times that limit due to their diet of fish contaminated with mercury.** Levels over 1 ppm mercury in hair are associated with the onset of neurological impairment.
- Over half of the women sampled in communities that subsist from small-scale gold mining in Indonesia, Kenya, Myanmar and Paraguay measured over 1 ppm. Excluding Paraguay, where fish is not the protein staple, 81% of women were above 1ppm, with women in two Indonesian locations measuring between **three and nine times above** the US EPA threshold for mercury.
- One out of five women in the communities studied near heavily industrialized areas have mercury levels over 1 ppm. This includes women in Nepal, Nigeria, and Thailand, where contaminated sites pollute local land, waterways and food sources. Additionally, women near contaminated sites in Albania, Chile, Kazakhstan, Nepal and Ukraine measured average levels above 0.58ppm –a level which scientists now accept as the minimum safe level.

IPEN, a global NGO network fighting toxic pollution, **encourages delegates to act immediately to end mercury poisoning by taking action on coal-fired power plants and mercury use in gold mining, and by adopting contaminated sites guidance.** Such concrete actions are critical to ensure that the Minamata tragedy is not repeated around the world.

High Levels of Mercury in Skin Whitening Products Tested at COP1

Mercury is harming people due to environmental exposure, but also from every day use of some personal products. IPEN invited delegates to bring skin lightening creams to the COP1 to be tested by an X-ray fluorescence (XRF) device. An astounding 72% of the skin lightening creams tested (64 out of the 89 skin creams sampled) contained mercury levels above 10 ppm. 10 ppm is ten times above the legal limit set by the US, UK and China.

The 89 product samples came from fourteen countries:

Bangladesh, Benin, Cameroon, Kenya, Mauritius, Mexico, Philippines, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The regulation norms for most countries, including China and South Africa, is 1ppm for skin creams. The COP1 skin lightening creams sampled with the highest levels of mercury included:

Sri Lanka: 7,000 ppm

St. Kitts and Nevis & Mexico: 8,000 ppm

South Africa: 8,800 ppm

Philippines: 10,000 ppm

Mercury Action for UNEA3:

All High Level Delegates are invited to have their hair sampled for mercury. IPEN will report on the final results prior to UNEA3 to raise awareness about mercury pollution and work to eliminate it.