

[Ministry of Health/ Other?] Mercury-free Health Care Policy

[country]

Whereas:

The Hippocratic Oath, “First Do No Harm,” is more relevant today than ever. For while scientific progress allows us to treat illnesses with more effectiveness and efficiency, it also engenders a paradox; the health care sector emits a diversity of harmful pollutants. One of these is mercury, a known neurotoxin, which is used in a dwindling number of medical products and devices but nevertheless contributes to the buildup of mercury in the local and global environment, in seafood and in consumers of seafood.

[Include as relevant to the country/region] A declaration¹ was adopted at the First Latin American Conference on the Elimination of Mercury in Health Care, Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2006. This resolution builds off from that earlier declaration.

The Minamata Convention on Mercury² has demonstrated that sufficient scientific evidence exists regarding the adverse global effects of mercury and its compounds. Ratified by 138 Parties, the Convention is designed to protect human health and the environment through controlling the anthropogenic releases of mercury throughout its lifecycle.

Mercury-added products and devices used in health care settings are a potential source of exposure for patients, personnel and the general population.³

Latin American and Caribbean health care institutions, as centers of disease prevention and care for patients, workers, the community and the environment, should end their contribution to mercury pollution and work toward the progressive elimination of mercury containing devices, replacing them with accessible, accurate and available alternatives.

Therefore measures are needed to reduce and ultimately eliminate mercury’s risks to human health and the environment.

The health care sector in St. Kitts and Nevis can play a key leadership role on this issue, raising awareness on the risks and impacts of mercury, the need to phase out all unnecessary mercury uses and releases, replacing mercury-added products and devices with mercury-free alternatives.

The health care sector in St. Kitts and Nevis recognizes that there is a much higher percentage of waste mercury-added products and devices disposed in the health care waste stream. It also understands that it is generally cost prohibitive to separately collect, manage, store and dispose of mercury-added devices in an environmentally sound manner and a more sustainable

¹ https://noharm-uscanada.org/sites/default/files/documents-files/860/Mercury_Declar_Buenos_Aires.pdf

² <https://www.mercuryconvention.org/en>

³ https://noharm-global.org/sites/default/files/documents-files/2460/Mercury_Elimination_Guide_for_Hospitals.pdf

approach would be to phase out all mercury uses as soon as possible.

Considering that:

- The World Health Organization has issued a policy that promotes the elimination of mercury in the health care sector and has provided several helpful guidance documents. Further to this, the World Health Organization's policy states that plans should be put in place for short-term reduction in the use of mercury-added equipment and its replacement with safer alternatives.⁴
- There are many examples around the world where countries and individual institutions have taken measures to eliminate mercury in health care. Among them are:
 - Health care sectors in many countries around the world, including Cuba, Uruguay and Argentina, the European Union and the United States, which have eliminated the sale of mercury added products and devices—including but not limited to thermometers, electrical devices, sphygmomanometers, thermostats and other equipment--along with the use of dental amalgam.
 - Numerous professional associations have adopted resolutions calling for the reduction and elimination of mercury containing medical devices.
- Mercury and mercury containing products flow throughout the global economy. The environment does not recognize borders; mercury pollution from any one country contributes to the load in the global ecosystem that is affecting our natural resources and the health of the peoples around the world.

Therefore, We [the Ministry of Health/ Other] agrees to:

- End procurement of mercury added measuring devices and dental amalgam.
- Phase-in mercury-free products and devices including mercury- free dental fillings.
- Put forward appropriate regulation, legislation and support enforcement measures nationally.
- Raise awareness by providing information, education and training, for health care workers, and the community, focusing on the impacts of mercury and the need to replace it.
- In medical schools, train students in the use of mercury-free products and devices.
- Work with vendors that market economically viable mercury-free alternatives.

⁴ https://noharm-global.org/sites/default/files/documents-files/2460/Mercury_Elimination_Guide_for_Hospitals.pdf