
World's Governments Agree to Mercury-Free Healthcare in 2020



The world's governments have finalised text for a global legally binding treaty on mercury, the bio-accumulative heavy metal that is poisoning the world's fish supply, threatening public health and the environment. Among other measures, the treaty text mandates an end to the manufacture, import and export of mercury thermometers and blood pressure devices (sphygmomanometers) by 2020.

Meeting around the clock in a marathon fifth and final round, negotiators agreed on the phase-out of these mercury-based medical devices. While no longer in use in Europe, most of the United States, and several developing countries, they are still commonly found in hospitals and pharmacies in much of the rest of the world, exposing workers, patients and the global environment to mercury emissions when they break and/or are disposed of.

"WHO issued a policy in 2005 calling for the gradual phase-out of mercury-based thermometers and blood pressure devices together with their substitution with viable alternatives," said Dr Maria Neira, Director, WHO's Department of Public Health and the Environment. "Today we are extremely pleased that the world's governments have agreed to such a phase-out. This will have a major benefit for global health."

Such a transition is already being supported and assisted in dozens of countries by the joint initiative established in 2008 by WHO and the international NGO Health Care Without Harm, to foster and support mercury substitution in the health sector around the world.

"Together with WHO we have been working with nurses, doctors, hospitals, health systems and ministries of health on every continent to demonstrate that mercury-free health care is not only possible, but positively doable," said Josh Karliner, International Coordinator for Health Care Without Harm. "We know that these alternatives are available, affordable and accurate. We are thrilled that there is now a global intergovernmental mandate for this phase-out by 2020* and are excited to get working on helping the health sector meet this timeframe."

The treaty is slated to be signed at diplomatic conference in Japan in October. After that, governments will need to ratify it in order for it to enter into force.

For more information, please visit: www.mercuryfreehealthcare.org

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