



OVERVIEW

The European Union has banned mercury thermometers and is considering a similar ban on mercury blood pressure devices. In the United States more than 28 states have bans or severe restrictions and it is impossible to find a mercury thermometer in most pharmacies in the country.

Many developing country health systems are finding that it is a cost-effective and straightforward proposition to substitute mercury-based medical devices with safe, affordable and accurate alternatives. Many have implemented substitution policies with support from or in collaboration with the WHO-HCWH Global Mercury-free Healthcare Initiative, a component of the UNEP Mercury Products Partnership. The following is an update on some mercury-substitution activities in the health sector around the world.

GLOBAL UPDATE

ASIA

China: HCWH partner Global Village of Beijing is working on reducing mercury pollution from healthcare sectors with Chinese NGOs and hospitals. Two mercury-free healthcare pilot projects have been launched in Changchun Children's Hospital and Qinhuangdao Maternal and Child Health Hospital. These projects are in addition to several hospitals in China that have already gone mercury-free.

India: As a result of a policy issued by the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Delhi in 2007, with a deadline of 2010 for complete phase out, Delhi is now mercury free. The government has helped the hospitals dispose of their mercury waste. In March 2010, the Directorate General of Health Services of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare advised all Central Government Hospitals and Health Centers, to gradually phase out mercury containing equipment. The Central Pollution Control Board has worked out guidelines for storage of mercury waste. In 2011, The Punjab Pollution Control Board in collaboration with Toxics Link, HCWH's India Partner, has initiated steps to gradually replace mercury-based medical equipment with non-mercury devices and aims at making Punjab state Healthcare mercury free by end of the year.

Indonesia: HCWH and Indonesia partner BaliFokus have worked during 2011 to promote mercury-free health care through the planned phase-out of mercury containing medical devices in seven hospitals Denpasar City, Indonesia. In a recent conference organized in Bali, the two organizations, together with WHO and government officials laid the groundwork for implementation in these hospitals as well as replication across the country.

Mongolia: The Ministry of Health and the National Emergency Management Agency of Mongolia issued a Joint Order to "ban further procurement of the mercury containing thermometer, sphygmomanometer and dental amalgam, beginning January 15, 2011 and to authorize directors of the corresponding organizations

and city and provincial health care departments and managers of all level health care organizations to take measures to reduce the use of mercury containing medical equipment and replace them with mercury-free alternatives."

Nepal: Three hospitals are now mercury-free with several more moving in that direction. WHO has supported the creation of a nation-wide national mercury-free feasibility study.

Philippines: In 2008 the Department of Health issued a national policy to phase-out mercury in healthcare. In 2011 an HCWH survey found that out of 1,851 Philippine hospitals, 1,204 hospitals have gone mercury-free.

AFRICA

South Africa: With mercury substitution in the health sector well underway in Provinces such as KwaZulu Natal and the Western Cape, the Department of Environmental Affairs has recommended that the Ministry of Health issue a directive to all Provincial Health Departments to discontinue the purchase of all mercury thermometers and blood pressure devices.

Tanzania: HCWH partner, AGENDA carried out a baseline survey on mercury use in healthcare facilities and schools. The project counted with the participation of 56 schools and 43 healthcare facilities covering the whole country. The findings are being disseminated to the health and education communities as well as policy makers so as to raise awareness on the environmental and health issues of mercury and lead to its phase out. A WHO study is also underway.

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina: The Ministry of Health (MOH) put in place a national policy to substitute mercury-based medical devices in health care in 2009 and in 2010 issued an order to prohibit the commercialization of mercury blood pressure devices. In September 2011, the National Ombudsman joined a broad coalition of health organizations to call on the MOH to end the sale of mercury thermometers to the general public while guaranteeing vulnerable groups access to alternatives.

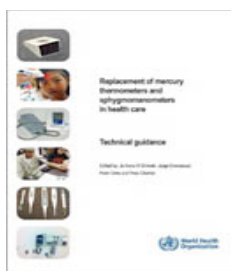
Brazil: With Sao Paulo and Santa Catarina states legislating a phase-out of mercury-based medical devices, a recent report documented 671 health establishments, including 207 hospitals that have completed substitution. A number of Brazilian hospitals have joined the WHO-HCWH Global Initiative and the Ministry of Health recently held a forum to explore a more widespread phase-out.

Chile: With more than 127 hospitals already committed to mercury substitution, in 2011 the Ministry of health adopted a national policy for the 206 public hospitals in the country. The policy requires all hospitals to begin substitution by the end of this year.

Costa Rica: The Social Security Administration adopted a policy that seeks to avoid the purchase of mercury thermometers and blood pressure devices in health care institutions. To date, 3 national hospitals are mercury free and seven more are in process.

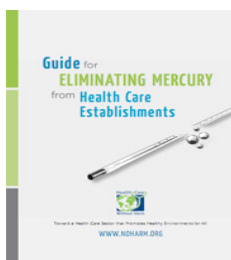
Mexico: In 2009 the Health Secretariat of Mexico City joined the WHO-HCWH Global Initiative, committing to eliminate mercury from its public health system comprising 29 hospitals and 230 primary care clinics. It has subsequently deauthorized the purchase of mercury thermometers, sphygmomanometers and dental amalgam. Today, more than 40 hospitals in the country have successfully eliminated all mercury thermometers and blood pressure devices.

NEW RESOURCES



WHO Technical Guidance on Substituting Mercury Thermometers and Sphygmomanometers

WHO has issued a Technical Guidance Document for the safe substitution of non-mercury thermometers and sphygmomanometers in health-care settings. It identifies available resources that support the equivalent accuracy and comparable clinical utility of the substituted products, while protecting health-care workers and the environment. It is designed to support professionals responsible for institutions or ministries desiring to switch to safer non-polluting technologies in health care. (Currently available only in English).



HCWH Mercury Substitution Guide

In order to scale-up the replacement of mercury-based medical devices around the world, HCWH has put together a guide that systematizes the basic steps in mercury substitution. (Guides currently available in Spanish, English, Portuguese, Chinese and Bahasa).



GEF Guidance Document on Cleanup, Storage, and Transport of Health Care Mercury Waste

The UNDP GEF Global Health Care Waste Project has issued a Guidance Document on the Cleanup, Temporary or Intermediate Storage, and Transport of Mercury Waste from Healthcare Facilities. As health facilities phase out mercury devices, proper methods of storage and transport are needed.

