



Mercury Use:

Frequently Asked Questions

(FAQs)

What is Mercury?

- ▶ Mercury is a naturally occurring element found in air, water, and soil. It's emitted from both natural and human based activities. Uganda ratified the Minamata Convention on Mercury on March 1, 2019, marking a commitment to protect human health and the environment from mercury pollution. By ratifying the convention, Uganda has committed to implementing measures to reduce and eliminate mercury use in various sectors, including artisanal and small-scale gold mining.

What are the health impacts of using mercury in Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining (ASGM)?

- ▶ Mercury is considered by the World Health Organization as one of the top 10 chemicals or groups of chemicals of major public health concern. Exposure to mercury, even in small amounts, is associated with serious health problems.
- ▶ Mercury spreads through the body and can affect the lungs, skin, kidneys, and brain. The effects of being exposed to mercury include difficulty breathing, difficulty walking, blurred vision, tremors, infertility, and impotence.
- ▶ These effects may not be immediate, they can take years to appear and can be irreversible. Mercury is also very dangerous for pregnant women, affecting a child even before it is born.

How do people get exposed to mercury used in ASGM activities?

- ▶ The final stage of gold recovery often uses mercury, but mercury is very poisonous. Mercury vapour can remain in the air, get deposited on clothes, carried in the wind to your homes, and into water where it can end up in fish. Fumes from mercury are dangerous, but you can't see them or smell them.
- ▶ You can be exposed to mercury from the fumes. The fumes are dangerous when mercury is being heated, but also at normal temperatures, mercury gives off a vapour when it is being handled or if a container is not closed properly.
- ▶ This mercury vapour can remain in the air, get deposited on clothes, carried in the wind to your homes, and into water where it can end up in fish.
- ▶ You can also be exposed to mercury when you touch it, from eating contaminated food, or when mercury in tailings is mixed with cyanide which produces toxic compounds. The effects of being exposed to mercury include difficulty breathing, difficulty walking, blurred vision, tremors, infertility and impotence.

Can people exposed to mercury be treated?

- ▶ There's no cure for mercury poisoning. Once the neurologic consequences of mercury toxicity are manifested in a person, they are, unfortunately, irreversible. The person will need continuing treatment to manage the effects of mercury poisoning. The best way to treat mercury poisoning is to limit your exposure to the metal.

Are there other countries with artisanal and small-scale gold miners?

- ▶ ASGM activities take place in approximately 80 countries globally, spread across Asia, Africa, and the Americas.



I live far away from areas with mining activities. How does mercury use at the mines affect me?

- ▶ Mercury emitted to the air doesn't just affect local communities. Mercury can be transported around the world in the atmosphere and can contaminate locations thousands of kilometers from its point of release. It can cycle between the atmosphere and the surface of land or swamps, rivers, lakes oceans for decades.

Are there alternatives to extract gold without mercury?

- ▶ Yes. There are several technologies that either reduce or eliminate the use of mercury in artisanal gold mining. The appropriate technologies will depend on the ore type, available resources, and social and economic factors. There is no single technology appropriate to every ASGM situation, but successful approaches often include some combination of: improved crushing and milling; gravity concentration tools such as sluicing and shaking tables; flotation; and chemical leaching.

Is planetGOLD a gold certification system?

- ▶ No, planetGOLD does not certify gold products.

