



## Mercury Triggers Premature Birth

By Kim Rahn  
Staff Reporter

The more mercury pregnant women are exposed to, the greater chance they have of giving premature birth to babies, according to a study.

Research on 85 pregnant women conducted by Ha Eun-hee, a professor of Ewha Womans University's preventive medicine department, showed that women with high levels of mercury in cord blood are three to five times more likely to give premature birth, which is to deliver a child in less than 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Ha announced the study results on Friday during a meeting of the Korean Society for Preventive Medicine.

According to the study, the 50 percent of the 85 people with the highest levels of mercury had a 3.1 times greater chance of having a premature delivery than the lower 50 percent. The upper 25 percent had a 5.3 times more of a chance than the lower 75 percent.

“Mercury in cord blood, which connects the mother and the fetus, is critical to the child, as it directly flows to the fetus,” Ha said.

The study disclosed two main reasons for the mercury concentration — dental treatment with amalgam and fish consumption.

Pregnant women who had treatments with amalgam during the pregnancy had an average of 5.15 micrograms of mercury per 1 liter of blood, 1.3 times more than the 3.98 micrograms in women who hadn't had the treatment.

The mercury level increased in proportion to the frequency of treatment. Women undergoing the amalgam treatment fewer than three times had an average 4.8 micrograms of mercury in their blood, while those having undergone the treatment three to six times had 5.04 micrograms, and seven times or more 5.2 micrograms.

Also, a woman who never had fish during pregnancy had 4.6 micrograms of mercury per 1 liter of blood, while the mercury level of women who consumed fish more than four times per week had an average mercury level of 8.3 micrograms.

“The nation should prepare education programs for pregnant women, advising them not to undergo dental treatments with amalgam,” Ha said.

Professor Yi Seung-muk at Seoul National University's graduate school of public health said a great deal of mercury in the air above the Korean Peninsula is from China's industrial areas.

Yi's team measured mercury levels in the air and followed the path of wind to China. “We obtained Chinese institutes' data about the industrial locations emitting

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mercury and compared them with our data, which correlated with the Chinese data," Yi said.

It was the first South Korean research about mercury pollution from China, although international academic circles have presented studies about the issue. It is said that half of the world's mercury pollutants in the air come from the country with the largest populace.

``Mercury is contained not only in the air, but also in fish. Korea and Japan, which are near China and consume large amounts of fish, have a greater chance of being exposed to mercury than other countries," Yi said.

The research was announced at a meeting of the Korean Society for Atmospheric Environment on Friday. Yi will soon present the amount and ratio of pollutants carried to Korea.

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