

**MERCURY POLICY PROJECT • INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF ORAL MEDICINE AND  
TOXICOLOGY • CONSUMERS FOR DENTAL CHOICE**

MEDIA ADVISORY  
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**Americans mostly “in the dark” about mercury in dental fillings  
Overwhelming support for “informed consent,” new poll finds**

*77% of dental patients, given information and choice,  
would pay more for mercury-free fillings*

WASHINGTON –Most all Americans – 92 percent – want “informed consent” about potential risks from mercury in dental fillings or alternatives before any treatment begins – not surprising, given that many Americans also believe mercury pollution is a serious problem in the environment, a new poll finds.

"It's very rare that you find 92% of the American public in favor of anything," said the pollster, John Zogby. "This shows the issue is real, and it really ought to be a wakeup call to dentists and politicians."

The poll also finds that 76% of consumers still don't know that any “silver” fillings in their mouths contain mercury. And 77 % of those polled would choose alternatives to mercury fillings, even if they cost more.

Questions about the findings and their implications for dentists, patients, the environment and public policy may be posed to experts on a **press conference call for credentialed journalists only**:

Time: 12 noon Eastern (9 a.m. Pacific), Tuesday, Feb. 14  
Call-in info: Dial 319-632-1100 and enter passcode 418643#

The poll was conducted by **Zogby International**, which polled 1,216 adults by telephone, Jan. 13-16, 2006. Additional results include:

- Nearly half (47%) of persons polled think mercury pollution poses a serious problem for the environment; and
- More than two-thirds (69%) of New Englanders, in a companion survey conducted over the Internet, would support a ban on mercury amalgam fillings for pregnant women and children.

A new report, “**What Patients Don’t Know: Dentists’ Sweet Tooth for Mercury**,” accompanies the poll. It cites U.S. EPA statistics that dental clinics use 34 tons of mercury in fillings annually – the third-largest use of mercury. The dental industry is the largest source of mercury pollution in wastewater.

In response to the poll findings, the report recommends that:

- **Consumers** be provided with information about mercury fillings and alternatives, so dental patients have the same *informed choice* as patients in doctors’ offices for other procedures;
- Since amalgam manufacturers and the **American Dental Association** warn dentists to avoid mercury exposure, dental clinics should extend the same warnings to patients, particularly to pregnant women and young children – as mandated by Canada and several European countries;
- **The dental industry** should no longer be allowed to burden the environment with mercury pollution; and,
- **Dental insurance plans** should provide equal coverage for mercury and non-mercury fillings, thereby assuring the patient and dentist the freedom to choose.

The poll was conducted for the Mercury Policy Project and paid for by the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology. In releasing the report, these groups are joined by Consumers for Dental Choice, New England Zero Mercury Campaign, Clean Water Action and Sierra Club California.

(MORE)

## Americans mostly “in the dark” about mercury in dental fillings

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A typical amalgam filling is approximately half mercury, and may contain as much of the metal as an old-fashioned thermometer. Usually called “silver fillings” because of their color, they have been in use since before the Civil War, ranking it among the longest-surviving medical devices.

In the past 30 years, however, U.S. government reports have documented the toxic effects of mercury, resulting in this known neurotoxin being phased out of nearly every facet of manufacturing, consumer products and medical care. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that total mercury use today is less than half of the amount used a decade ago. Meanwhile, dentists continue to place upwards of 70 million mercury fillings a year, accounting for some 34 tons of mercury annually used, according to EPA. Over half of all mercury (over 1,000 tons) currently in use in the U.S. today resides in Americans’ dental fillings, waiting to pollute the environment.

Despite the fact that the American Dental Association and the dental industry are well aware of the risks of mercury in the dental office to pregnant women and children, and to the environment, warnings to dentists on the “material safety data sheets” for dental amalgam routinely are not passed on to patients.

Many dentists may also not tell patients of other affordable alternatives, even though according to the poll, 77% would choose higher-cost fillings that do not contain mercury, if given the choice.

Discussing the **What Patients Don’t Know: Dentists’ Sweet Tooth for Mercury** report and the Zogby International poll findings on the press conference call at noon Eastern on Tuesday, Feb. 14, will be:

**Michael Bender, director, Mercury Policy Project, [www.mercurypolicy.org](http://www.mercurypolicy.org).** “While most Americans don’t know what’s in their teeth, nearly everyone wants to be filled in—before they’re drilled and billed,” Bender says. “Mercury-free tooth care is better for everyone because the 1,000 tons of mercury in Americans’ mouths today may soon be polluting waterways and fish we eat.”

**Dr. David Wallinga, MD, director, Food and Health Program, Institute for Agriculture and Trade, [www.iatp.org/foodandhealth](http://www.iatp.org/foodandhealth).** “Americans expect their doctors to ‘do no harm,’ in part by providing informed consent,” Wallinga says. “Why should we expect anything less from dentists? Especially when it comes to involving mercury, of all things, which is toxic in all its forms.”

**Charles Brown, national counsel, Consumers for Dental Choice, [www.toxicteeth.org](http://www.toxicteeth.org),** who says that, “We know that the manufacturers and the ADA are telling the dentists about the precautions they should be taking when they’re using mercury in fillings. That’s why we need state requirements, like Maine and California have, that dentists provide this information.”

**Dr. Richard Fischer, DDS, FAGD, FIAOMT, Past President of the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology, [www.iaomt.org](http://www.iaomt.org),** who says that, “You can have a successful practice, and serve patients well, while not using mercury-containing fillings. We do it every day, and we encourage all dentists to follow our lead. Their patients will be glad they did.”

For additional information about environmental impacts and alternatives to dental mercury, see also:

Clean Water Action, [www.cleanwateraction.org/mercury](http://www.cleanwateraction.org/mercury)

“*Fillings: The Choices You Have/Mercury Amalgam and Other Filling Materials*,” a patient education/information brochure prepared by the Maine Department of Human Services, Bureau of Health, 2002, <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/files/odh/AmalBrochFinal2.doc>

“*Mercury-free Dental Fillings: Phase out of amalgam in Sweden*,” Swedish Chemical Inspectorate, 2005, [http://www.kemi.se/upload/Trycksaker/Pdf/PM/PM9\\_05.pdf](http://www.kemi.se/upload/Trycksaker/Pdf/PM/PM9_05.pdf)

**To join the press conference call at noon Eastern time on Tuesday, Feb. 14, credentialed journalists should dial 319-632-1100 and enter passcode 418643#.**

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