

New Studies Find Mercury in High-Fructose Corn Syrup

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According to two new U.S. studies, released in January 2009, almost half of tested samples of commercial high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) contained mercury, and was also found in nearly a third of 55 popular brand-name food and beverage products where HFCS is the first-or second-highest labeled ingredient. HFCS has replaced sugar as the sweetener in many beverages and foods such as breads, cereals, breakfast bars, lunch meats, yogurts, soups, candy, juice, jelly, and condiments. Some of the foods tested were from the brands Hershey's, Quaker, Hunt's, Manwich, Smucker's, Kraft, Nutri-Grain, and Yoplait.

On average, Americans consume about 12 teaspoons per day of HFCS, but teens and other high consumers can take in 80 percent more HFCS than the average.

In the first study, published in current issue of *Environmental Health*, researchers found detectable levels of mercury in nine of 20 samples of commercial HFCS. And in the second study, the **Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy** (IATP), a nonprofit watchdog group, found that nearly one in three of 55 brand-name foods contained mercury. The chemical was found most commonly in HFCS-containing dairy products, dressings and condiments.

In a prepared statement, IATP's David Wallinga, MD, and a co-author in both studies, explained, "**Mercury is toxic in all its forms**, and even a small amount of mercury can be seriously unhealthy. This could be a significant additional source of mercury never before considered. The use of mercury-contaminated caustic soda in the production of HFCS is common. The contamination occurs when mercury cells are used to produce caustic soda. The bad news is that nobody knows whether or not their soda or snack food contains HFCS made from ingredients like caustic soda contaminated with mercury."

Not unexpected, an organization representing the refiners is disputing the results published in *Environmental Health*. Audrae Erickson, president of

the Corn Refiners Association, responded with this prepared statement: "This study appears to be based on outdated information of dubious significance. Our industry has used mercury-free versions of the two re-agents mentioned in the study, hydrochloric acid and caustic soda, for several years. These mercury-free re-agents perform important functions, including adjusting pH balances."

However, the IATP told the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* that four plants in Georgia, Tennessee, Ohio and West Virginia still use "mercury-cell" technology that can lead to contamination. Disputing Erickson's assurances, IATP's Ben Lilliston also told *HealthDay* that the *Environmental Health* findings were based on information gathered by the FDA in 2005. And the group's own study, while not peer-reviewed, was based on products "bought off the shelf in the autumn of 2008."

Recent Reports have also come out that the FDA knew about traces of the toxic substance in food, and sat on the information. This news comes out just as we've learned that the peanut butter factory responsible for the salmonella outbreak has a storied history of health violations, also long-ignored by the FDA. What a slap in the face for food safety.

More research is needed to determine exactly which foods are affected, but its already been demonstrated that high fructose corn syrup can contribute to obesity and diabetes. Our recommendation is to avoid, if possible, foods containing HFCS.