



Toxic teeth?



Fresh debate over use of mercury in the mouth

by Amy Mastin

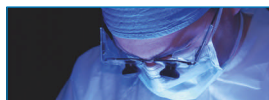
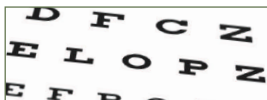
Marie Flowers believes she was poisoned by her teeth. While vacationing in July 2001, a Tennessee dentist used a temporary patch when Flowers broke a tooth with a silver filling, causing a metallic taste in her mouth. When she returned home to Vinton, Va., in early August, her regular dentist whittled down the tooth and put a crown over it. By mid-August, Flowers felt as if she were in “The Twilight Zone.” At 51, the prison minister experienced blurred vision and confusion. Her head throbbed, her ears rang and her muscles ached.

Three months and several doctor visits later, an alternative medicine doctor in Troutdale, Va., ordered a metals test. Flowers learned she had a high level of mercury in her body — released, she’s convinced, from the broken tooth and nine other silver fillings in her mouth. “I put the dates together concerning my visits to the dentist and the symptoms appearing shortly after that,” Flowers says. “I started thinking about a lawsuit, but I couldn’t find a Virginia lawyer to take my case [because] my dentist didn’t violate standards of care.”



PHOTO BY BILL KARR *Marie Flowers supports organizations that take a stand against silver fillings.*

Dentists have used silver fillings, also called amalgams, for more than 150 years and continue to use them to a lesser extent because they’re cheap, durable and easy to manipulate. But some scientists claim the fillings, which contain liquid mercury, are unsafe, releasing poisonous vapors as people drink, chew, brush and undergo dental work that can cause damage to the brain, kidneys or nervous system.



The American Dental Association has acknowledged that mercury vapors are emitted, just not in toxic amounts. But the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is now saying amalgams may be harmful to some, posting this statement on their website June 3: “Dental amalgams contain mercury, which may have neurotoxic effects on the nervous systems of developing children and fetuses.”

The FDA statement is the result of a settlement between Moms Against Mercury, along with 10 other plaintiffs, and FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach. The plaintiffs previously requested amalgams

be classified by the FDA as a medical device — a type of safety rating — and took their case to court when that didn’t happen by June 2007. “We tried petitions, congressional hearings and scientific advisory committees, all to no avail,” says Charlie Brown, counsel for plaintiff National Consumers for Dental Choice. “So in the great American tradition, we sued.”

According to the settlement, the FDA has until July 2009 to classify amalgams. FDA spokesperson Karen Riley says the matter is still being investigated and she won’t discuss details before the final ruling.

Pregnant women and children



PHOTO BY BRANDON SMITH *Dr. Jerry Nieten of Noblesville, Ind., says he utilizes a number of safety precautions to limit mercury exposure when removing amalgams.*



were initially warned by the FDA of the dangers of mercury in fish seven years ago — a step applauded by many. “Developing brains are most at risk,” Brown says. “We want to protect the children first and foremost. This is a starting point.”

“Eighty percent of the body’s mercury burden is directly related to dental work, not fish consumption,” adds Dr. Boyd Haley, chairman of the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology Scientific Advisory Board, a network of dentists, physicians and researchers who study the affects of dental devices in the body. “Since [a] dental amalgam constantly emits mercury vapor just inches from the brain, it could only be classified [with] the most dangerous products.”

Dr. Rod Mackert, ADA spokesperson, says two studies cited in the Journal of the American Medical Association in April 2006 show that children with silver fillings had

According to an online poll, **66% of Angie’s List members still have silver fillings.** To learn about the pros and cons of having them removed, visit magazine.angieslist.com.

higher mercury levels than those with white fillings, but there were no significant differences between them in IQ, memory or motor skills.

Some scientists argue those studies are flawed, including Haley and Dr. Herbert Needleman, a researcher known for his work in childhood lead poisoning. “The delayed effects of early toxic exposure on health later in life aren’t addressed in these reports,” Needleman says. “Mercury also has been suggested as a risk factor for multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer’s Disease.”

In light of this, Flowers isn’t alone in thinking amalgams should be banned, as she testified to the FDA in 2006. She had her fillings removed and is recovering with a variety of treatments. “Everyone poisoned by their dentist needs to speak out,” she says. “So I’m speaking.”

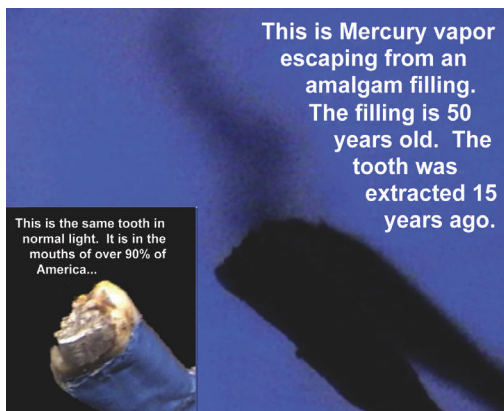


PHOTO COURTESY OF UNINFORMED CONSENT *Uninformed Consent* used this photo in “Mercury, A Slow Death- Episode I,” a dental documentary.