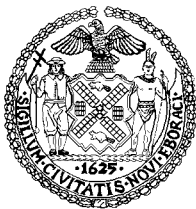


Azogue Vidajan Metallic Mercury Poisoning



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Commissioner

Web Site: www.ci.nyc.ny.us/health

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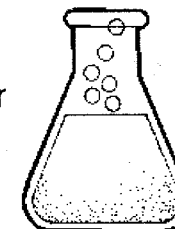
This brochure was developed and edited by Natasha Dwamena, Nancy Jeffery, and Lori Stevenson of the New York City Department of Health's Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Disease Prevention. Special thanks to the NYC DOH Office of Cultural Affairs and Alexandra Ternier for their translation services.

What is Azogue/Vidajan?

Azogue is Spanish and *Vidajan* is Haitian Creole for metallic mercury also known as *quicksilver* in English.

Metallic mercury is a very toxic, silver-gray liquid metal.

- ◆ It does not dissolve in water or alcohol.
- ◆ It has no smell but has a metallic taste.
- ◆ It can be a liquid or a vapor at room temperature.
- ◆ It can remain where spilled for several months.
- ◆ It evaporates in air.
- ◆ Its vapors cannot be seen.



ALL TYPES OF MERCURY ARE TOXIC.

Azogue/Vidajan is found in thermometers used to measure body temperature, some paints (made before 1991), electrical switches, thermostats and batteries. It is also sold in botánicas in capsules in amounts ranging from a few grams to 3-5 ounces for spiritual "works" (*trabajos*).



An *azogue/vidajan* capsule can contain up to 10 times more mercury than one thermometer.

The mercury vapor from these capsules is heavier than air, so the vapor tends to settle near the floor. **Children may be at a greater risk** of breathing in the vapor, because they may crawl and play on floors.

WHAT IS AZOGUE/VIDAJAN USED FOR?

Some people use *azogue/vidajan* in traditional medicine or for spiritual/religious purposes, such as:

- ◆ to cleanse or protect the home
- ◆ to cure stomach ailments
- ◆ for spiritual cleansing
- ◆ for protection and to increase good fortune
- ◆ to offer petitions to the Yoruba gods
- ◆ for love spells

When used for spiritual/religious purposes, *azogue/vidajan* has been:

- ◆ placed in floor washes or sprinkled onto the floor
- ◆ applied to the skin or used in baths
- ◆ swallowed
- ◆ placed in oil lamps or candles
- ◆ kept inside vials or charm bags as amulets



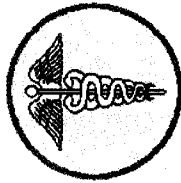
IS THERE A SAFE WAY TO USE AZOGUE/VIDAJAN?

NO! There is always a risk of breathing *azogue* vapors when it is used in any way.

→ *Azogue/Vidajan* is dangerous when inhaled. It can also be harmful when swallowed or applied to the skin.

→ *Azogue/Vidajan* gets into carpets, draperies, furniture, and cracks in the floors when spilled. It can stay in a room for months or years.

→ You won't know how often you are breathing *azogue/vidajan* vapor because you cannot see or smell it.



HOW CAN AZOGUE/VIDAJAN AFFECT YOUR HEALTH?

- Azogue/Vidajan can stay in your kidneys and brain for months. The most affected part of the body is the nervous system.
- Azogue/Vidajan can cause permanent damage to the brain and kidneys. It can harm the developing baby, and may even cause death.
- The health effects depend on how much and for how long a person has had contact with azogue/vidajan.

Signs and Symptoms of Azogue/Vidajan (Metallic Mercury) Poisoning :

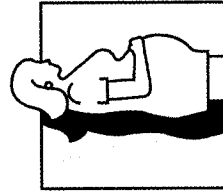
- ◆ tremors
- ◆ irritability and shyness
- ◆ redness and swelling of the mouth and gums
- ◆ memory loss
- ◆ headache
- ◆ tiredness and difficulty sleeping
- ◆ depression
- ◆ loss of appetite and weight loss
- ◆ eye and skin irritation
- ◆ respiratory failure and death (after very high exposures)

- It may take a long time for signs and symptoms to develop. For this reason, poisoning may be difficult to diagnose.
- Tell your doctor if you experience any of these signs and symptoms. Also let your doctor know if you use azogue/vidajan (metallic mercury).

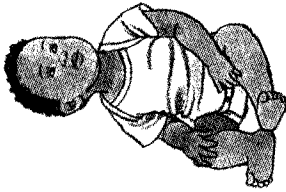


Health Effects on Children

Azogue/Vidajan is most dangerous to the unborn child and small children.



Vapors breathed in by pregnant women can enter the developing baby. Azogue/vidajan can also be passed to an infant through the mother's breast milk.



Toddlers who crawl on floors where *azogue/vidajan* has been spread may breathe it in or may swallow it. This exposure can cause brain damage that may lead to behavioral and learning problems.

The younger the child, the greater the risk of long-term effects.

Children are more affected by mercury than adults. Some children exposed to *azogue/vidajan* can develop a condition called *acrodyndia* or *pink disease*.

Signs and Symptoms of Acrodyndia in Children:

- ◆ severe leg cramps
- ◆ irritability
- ◆ numbness, prickling or tingling
- ◆ painful pink fingers
- ◆ peeling hands, feet and nose
- ◆ rash
- ◆ heavy sweating
- ◆ sensitivity to light



WHAT CAN BE USED INSTEAD OF AZOGUE/VIDAJAN?

Botánicas have substitutes for *azogue/vidajan*.

Alternatives to *azogue/vidajan* can be found in books sold in botánicas. You can also ask an *espiritista*, *santero* or *doktè fey* to suggest other things that may be used in place of *azogue/vidajan*.

HOW TO MEASURE THE AMOUNT OF AZOGUE/VIDAJAN IN THE BODY OR HOME

The only way to know if there are *azogue/vidajan* vapors in the home is to test for it with special equipment, such as a mercury detector (mercury vapor analyzer) that measures the level of *azogue/vidajan* in the air in the home. For more information about mercury air testing, call the New York City Department of Health.

There are laboratory tests that measure the level of *azogue/vidajan* in urine and blood. A urine test is the best way to measure for exposure to

