

Thimerosal Information Sheet

What is thimerosal?

Thimerosal is used as a preservative in some vaccines. A preservative is something that is added to keep what it is added to safe for a longer time. It breaks down to ethylmercury. This quickly leaves your body through your stool.

It is not the same as:

- methylmercury - gets into your body when you eat contaminated fish like sword fish, tuna, king mackerel, and shark.
- phenylmercury - is a chemical used to kill fungus.

These types of mercury build up in the body. These are not removed from your body like ethylmercury.

Why is thimerosal used in vaccines?

Thimerosal has been used as a preservative in vaccine vials that have more than one dose (multi-dose) since the 1930s. It stops bacteria and fungi from growing inside the vial of vaccine. If the vaccine becomes contaminated, it could cause serious infections in people who get it.

Thimerosal is also used to inactivate (or kill) the virus or bacteria in some vaccines. Only small amounts of thimerosal are in these vaccines.

Is thimerosal in vaccines used in Alberta?

In Alberta, only a few vaccines have thimerosal in them. Multi-dose vials of influenza vaccine have small amounts of thimerosal. Other routine childhood vaccines have not had thimerosal since 1994. Live vaccines, such as MMR and varicella, have never had thimerosal.

Is there a problem with getting thimerosal (mercury) in vaccines?

No. In 2004 the Institute of Medicine (IOM) Immunization Safety Review Committee came to the conclusion that there is no relationship between thimerosal and autism.

Since then, more studies have shown no link between thimerosal and neurodevelopmental (brain development) disorders.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) states that there is no safety reason to avoid using products with thimerosal for children or older people, including pregnant women.

Where can I get more information about thimerosal?

If you have more questions, talk to a public health nurse or other healthcare provider.