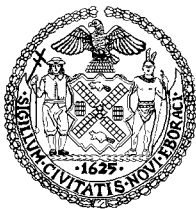


# Azogue Vidajan Metallic Mercury Poisoning



**THE CITY OF NEW YORK**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

Rudolph W. Giuliani  
*Mayor*

Neal L. Cohen, M.D.  
*Commissioner*

**Web Site: [www.ci.nyc.ny.us/health](http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/health)**

## Acknowledgments

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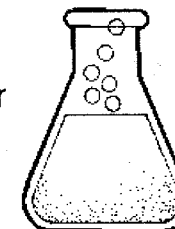
This brochure was developed and edited by Natasha Dwamena, Nancy Jeffery, and Lori Stevenson of the New York City Department of Health's Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Disease Prevention. Special thanks to the NYC DOH Office of Cultural Affairs and Alexandra Ternier for their translation services.

## 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)

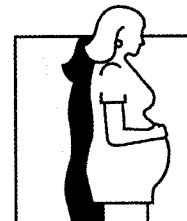
→ It may take a long time for signs and symptoms to develop. For this reason, poisoning may be difficult to diagnose.

→ 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 *acrodynia* or *pink disease*.

#### **Signs and Symptoms of Acrodynia 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?**

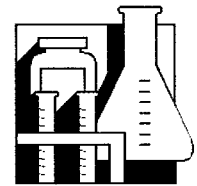
**Botánicas have substitutes for *azogue/vidajan*.**

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



*azogue/vidajan* (metallic mercury). If you think you have been exposed and need testing, call your doctor or the New York City Department of Health.

## HOW TO CLEAN UP AZOGUE/VIDAJAN

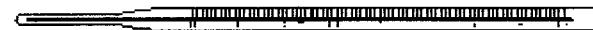
**When *azogue/vidajan* is spilled, it breaks apart into tiny silver beads that roll around and stick to surfaces and get in cracks.**



**Do not** use a vacuum cleaner, broom, or mop to collect spilled *azogue/vidajan*. Brooms and mops will spread the *azogue/vidajan* beads and a vacuum will heat the *azogue/vidajan*, causing it to give off DANGEROUS vapors.

**Do not** throw *azogue/vidajan* down sinks, toilets or bathtub drains. The *azogue/vidajan* may become trapped, then evaporate and re-enter the home.

Small amounts of *azogue/vidajan* (like the amount found in thermometers—about 4.5 grams)



can be cleaned up from surfaces like tile, wood, or linoleum floors. If *azogue/vidajan* has been spilled or placed on carpets, upholstery or other porous surfaces, throw them away if possible, or clean them using mercury spill kits and detergents.

**Do not attempt to clean-up large amounts of mercury (more than the amount found in a fever thermometer) yourself.**

**Method for Clean-up of SMALL (less than 5 grams) amounts of spilled *azogue/vidajan* (metallic mercury).**

- Keep children and pets away from the area before and during clean-up.
  - Remove gold jewelry. Mercury can damage gold items.
1. Have ready 4-5 sealable plastic bags (preferably ziplock), a trash bag, rubber or latex gloves, paper towels, cardboard or squeegee, an eyedropper, wide tape and a flashlight.

2. Put on rubber or latex gloves.
3. Carefully pick up any pieces of broken glass (from a thermometer or vial). Place them on a paper towel and put the towel in a zip lock bag to be thrown away.
4. Use stiff cardboard or a rubber squeegee to collect the silver beads in one place. (Use a flashlight to help you look for *azogue/vidajan* beads). Remember to look all around the area because the beads can stick to surfaces and get into cracks in the floor!
5. Use an eye dropper to carefully draw up the *azogue/vidajan* beads. Slowly squeeze the beads onto a damp paper towel. Put the towel in a zip lock bag to be sealed and thrown away.
6. Use the sticky side of wide tape to pick up any remaining glass and *azogue/vidajan* beads. When done, place the tape containing glass and *azogue/vidajan* into a zip lock bag.
7. When all visible pieces have been picked up and clean-up is done, place the cardboard or squeegee into a zip lock bag for disposal.

8. Carefully remove rubber gloves and place them in a zip lock bag.
9. Put the sealed zip locked bags in a sealed garbage bag and dispose with regular household trash.

→ If possible, open a window for 24 to 48 hours in the room where the *azogue/vidajan* was spilled to ventilate the area *after* the clean-up has been completed.

→ Do not vacuum area until 2-3 days after the clean-up. Make sure there are no beads of *azogue/vidajan* left before vacuuming! After this you may vacuum the area as needed.

It can be very difficult to completely remove *azogue/vidajan* beads that have made their way into cracked surfaces, such as wood, linoleum, ceramic or parquet floor tiles.

Mercury spill kits can be used to clean up spills. These kits are sold by safety equipment distributors, industrial safety supplies outlets, or laboratory safety services (check under *environmental and ecological products and services* or *laboratory safety services* in phone books).

If there is a large amount of mercury (more than the amount found in a fever thermometer) in your home or business and you want to dispose of it, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) can recycle the mercury. Please call the Department of Environmental Protection during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM) at 718-595-4784 to find out more about recycling mercury.

If a large amount of mercury has been spilled in your home or business, please call the New York City Department of Health Poison Control Center or the New York City Department of Environmental Protection.

**NYC Department of Health  
Poison Control Center:  
212-764-7667 (24 hours a day)**

**NYC Department Environmental Protection  
718-DEP-HELP (24 hours a day)**

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

If you have any questions about possible health effects from *azogue/vidajan* or how to clean up *azogue/vidajan* from your home, please call the New York City Department of Health.

If you have questions about the disposal of large amounts of mercury (more than the amount found in a fever thermometer), please call the New York City Department of Environmental Protection.

You can also talk to your doctor about *azogue/vidajan* and ask your *santero* or *espiritista* or *doktè fey* to suggest substitutes for *azogue/vidajan*.

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Bureau of Environmental and Occupational  
Disease Prevention  
*Information on Health Effects and Clean-up of Mercury*  
125 Worth St., CN-34Cs  
New York, NY 10013  
(212) 788-4290 (Monday-Friday, 9 AM -5 PM)

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Poison Control Center  
*Information on Health Effects and Clean-up of Mercury*  
455 First Ave. CN-81  
New York, NY 10016  
(212) 764-7667 (24 hours a day)

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION  
Department of Emergency Response and  
Technical Assessment  
*Information on Mercury Recycling*  
(718) 595-4784 (Monday-Friday, 9 AM -5 PM)  
  
*To report a large mercury spill*  
(718) DEP-HELP (24 hours a day)