



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF MATERNITY SERVICES
AND FAMILY PLANNING
280 BROADWAY, ROOM 303
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007
TELEPHONE: 566-7076

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ELIZABETH H. GRAHAM
Assistant Commissioner

SCOTTIE OWINGS
Deputy Assistant Commissioner

January 2, 1991

Arnold P. Wendoff, Ph.D.
298 Marlborough Road
Brooklyn, NY 11226

Dear Dr. Wendroff:

Thank you for your letter and the attachments regarding health hazards related to the occult use of mercury. We are particularly interested in the CDC study on mercury exposure and look forward to receiving the results. In the interim, thank you for alerting us to potential risks to the public health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elizabeth H. Graham".

Elizabeth H. Graham
Assistant Commissioner

EHG/msd
(wendroff)

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

January 28, 1991

Arnold P. Wendroff, Ph.D.
298 Marlborough Road
Brooklyn, New York 11226

Dear Dr. Wendroff:

Thank you for bringing to my attention your research and concerns about the sale of elemental mercury in botanicas and its potential use among people who practice Yoruba-based religions. Let me update you on what actions are being taken by the City of New York, and specifically the Health Department, to investigate and prevent mercury exposure.

The New York City Department of Health investigates all reported cases of mercury poisoning. As you may be aware, State Law requires that laboratories report cases of mercury poisoning to the State Health Department. The NYC Health code requires that all cases of toxic poisonings are reported by medical facilities to the City Health Department. To the best of my knowledge, you are correct in asserting that, to date, no cases of mercury poisoning have been identified within New York City. A surveillance mechanism is in place, however, so that should cases be reported in the future, they will be fully investigated.

Although no cases of mercury poisoning have been reported to date, we recognize that this doesn't provide full assurance that no problem exists. In recognition of the potential health risk, the New York City Department of Health is developing a community outreach and investigation program, to be conducted over the next several months. The campaign is designed to alert New Yorkers who sell or use mercury to the potential hazards and educate them about how to protect themselves. The Department of Health will also offer testing to botanica owners and users to determine whether mercury is present in the environment and if so, provide assistance with clean up and protection. Individuals who wish to be tested for mercury absorption will also be able to do so through the Department of Health free of charge. The confidentiality of individual participants will be fully protected. Based on the results of this investigation, recommendations may be issued.

Sincerely,

David N. Dinkins
M A Y O R

c: Woodrow A. Myers, Jr., MD, MBA
Commissioner of Health



OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

JOSEPH A. FERNANDEZ
CHANCELLOR

January 30, 1991

Arnold P. Wendroff, Ph.D.
298 Marlborough Road
Brooklyn, New York 11226

Dear Dr. Wendroff:

I wish to thank you for alerting us to the possible health risks to the children from mercury vapor exposure. We're especially concerned about this potential health threat because of the occult practices which you have described involving certain Afro-Caribbean/Latin American religions.

As a result of your letter, we have contacted the Department of Health requesting their advice as to the need for an educational campaign at the present time. If our public health officials perceive this exposure to mercury vapor as a valid health threat to our children, we will cooperate with the Department of Health in conducting an appropriate educational outreach to our children and their families.

I thank you for your interest and concern for the welfare of our children.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Fernandez
Chancellor

JAF:sm