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HEALTH

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Ron Mizutani

The silver fillings in your mouth contain a substance that is toxic: mercury. Studies show that 40 to 60 tons of mercury are used by the dental industry each year.

Is that mercury safe? It's a question that's been asked for more than 100 years and one that triggers debates and controversial answers.

Millions of Americans are replacing their silver fillings. As the silver fillings age, they may expand, and when they do -- teeth crack, which increases chances of tooth decay.

But there's another reason patients want these fillings out.

The more I got to know about it and found out there was mercury in my mouth I just flipped," said Zohreh Ellison. "All that metal with the saliva in my mouth and constant corrosion and I'm just swallowing that. How is this affecting me and the rest of my body as well, too?"

So she decided to replace them with composite fillings.

Cosmetic dentist Dr. Lia Dominici-Bly stopped using silver-mercury fillings years ago.

"I just don't like the idea it has mercury in it," Dominici-Bly said. "There is no research to say it is totally, 100 percent safe."

But the American Dental Association says when mercury is combined with other metals, the toxic properties are harmless.

But here's the twist. Despite claims of being safe, dentists are required by federal law to treat the fillings as hazardous materials.

Not good enough for our landfills but apparently good enough for our mouths.

Sweden, Norway, Japan and even Canada have all taken steps to limit and even phase out the use of mercury fillings, especially in children.



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