

Media Release

22 March 1999 **DENTAL AMALGAM AND MERCURY IN DENTISTRY**

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) today considered a report from a Health Advisory Committee (HAC) Working Party which examined current research on the issue of dental amalgam and mercury in dentistry.

The Working Party found no evidence to demonstrate a clear cut risk to public health.

"There is a lack of convincing evidence of a link between dental amalgam restorations and specific diseases and symptoms," Professor John Spencer, the Chair of the Working Party said.

"Nor is there any evidence of improvements in health upon removal of dental amalgam fillings. Further, no studies have been conducted comparing the health outcomes of people with and without dental amalgam fillings," he said.

Given that amalgam fillings do leach small amounts of mercury, the minimum level required to cause adverse effects was also considered.

"The commonly identified studies on occupational exposure to mercury, in industrial and dental surgery settings, are not of sufficient quality to establish the lowest level of mercury absorption associated with an adverse health effect. Therefore the difference between this level and the level commonly leached from dental fillings could not be estimated."

The Working Party found that dental amalgam continues to be a useful restorative material in some locations within the mouth.

"Dental amalgam has advantages over other material in certain circumstances because of its physical properties and handling characteristics," Professor Spencer said.

"But it would be prudent to avoid placement and replacement of dental amalgam fillings in certain population sub-groups such as pregnant women, children and people with kidney disease.

"Such avoidance is based on public health principles of risk avoidance, not on any credible evidence of harm. It is sensible to reduce the use of dental amalgam fillings where a safe and practical alternative exists," said Professor Spencer.

NHMRC will develop two brochures, one for dentists and one for consumers to enable clients and dentists to make informed decisions regarding appropriate treatment options.

Media Contact:

Professor John Spencer, Chair of the NHMRC's working party on dental amalgam is available for interview at today's council meeting. For more information, contact Jackie Westcombe on 0411 405 313.

[[^ to top](#)]

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