

**Connecticut Voters' Views
on Mercury in Dental Fillings**

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I. Methodology and Sample Characteristics

Survey Methodology of Connecticut Likely Voters: 7/25/05 through 7/26/05

This is a statewide telephone survey of likely voters conducted by Zogby International. The target sample is 401 interviews with approximately 17 questions asked. Samples are randomly drawn from telephone CDs of national listed sample. Zogby International surveys employ sampling strategies in which selection probabilities are proportional to population size within area codes and exchanges. As many as six calls are made to reach a sampled phone number. Cooperation rates are calculated using one of AAPOR's approved methodologies¹ and are comparable to other professional public-opinion surveys conducted using similar sampling strategies.² Weighting by political party, age, race, and gender is used to adjust for non-response. The margin of error is +/- 5.0 percentage points.

Zogby International's sampling and weighting procedures also have been validated through its political polling: more than 95% of the firm's polls have come within 1% of actual election-day outcomes.

| Sample Characteristics | Frequency | Valid Percent* |
|-------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Sample size | 401 | 100 |
| Southwest CT | 177 | 44 |
| Other region | 224 | 56 |
| Very likely to vote | 318 | 79 |
| Somewhat likely to vote | 83 | 21 |
| Democrat | 148 | 37 |
| Republican | 120 | 30 |
| Independent/Minor party | 130 | 33 |
| Libertarian | 2 | 1 |
| 18-29 | 63 | 16 |
| 30-49 | 164 | 42 |
| 50-64 | 109 | 28 |
| 65+ | 55 | 14 |

¹ See COOP4 (p.38) in *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates of Surveys*. The American Association for Public Opinion Research, (2000).

² *Cooperation Tracking Study: April 2003 Update*, Jane M. Sheppard and Shelly Haas. The Council for Marketing & Opinion Research (CMOR). Cincinnati, Ohio (2003).

Sample Characteristics (continued)

| | | |
|--------------------------|-----|----|
| 18–24 | 57 | 15 |
| 25–34 | 29 | 8 |
| 35–54 | 193 | 49 |
| 55–69 | 72 | 18 |
| 70+ | 40 | 10 |
| Did not answer age | 10 | -- |
| Less than high school | 8 | 2 |
| High school graduate | 49 | 12 |
| Some college | 115 | 29 |
| College graduate+ | 229 | 57 |
| Did not answer education | -- | -- |
| White | 333 | 85 |
| Hispanic | 27 | 7 |
| African American | 24 | 6 |
| Asian/Pacific | 4 | 1 |
| Other/mixed | 4 | 1 |
| Did not answer race | 9 | -- |
| Less than \$15,000 | 20 | 7 |
| \$15,000–\$24,999 | 14 | 5 |
| \$25,000–\$34,999 | 36 | 12 |
| \$35,000–\$49,999 | 36 | 12 |
| \$50,000–\$74,999 | 62 | 20 |
| \$75,000 or more | 136 | 45 |
| Did not answer income | 97 | -- |
| Male | 193 | 48 |
| Female | 208 | 52 |

* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent and might not total 100.

II. Executive Summary

Dental fillings are not a topic on which most people are prepared to converse on a moment's notice. A poll on such a topic can illuminate not only existing opinion, but the direction in which opinion is likely to move if respondents are exposed to more information.

A plurality of Connecticut's likely voters (35%), understandably, are not sure what materials go into dental fillings. One in four say silver (25%), while 13% say mercury, 8% say a combination of silver and mercury, and 19% say another substance altogether. Those who get their health information from the Internet are more than twice as likely to specify mercury as those who get their information directly from health-care professionals (21% vs. 10%). Republicans (19%) and young adults between 18 and 29 (22%) are also more likely than others to envision fillings as pure mercury.

When asked whether *silver* fillings contains mercury, almost half of respondents (46%) say they just aren't sure. Almost as many, however (40%), say they do think silver fillings contain mercury. Notably, this is a much larger percentage than the 8% who indicate "silver and mercury" in Question 1 -- suggesting that respondents are more likely to focus on mercury once they warm to the topic of dental fillings.

More than half (56%) of those who suspect the presence of mercury are not willing to guess what percentage of a silver filling is mercury. A plurality of the remainder (18%) say the percentage must be less than ten; 16% say it could be a quarter; and 9% place it between a quarter and a half. Just 2% think silver fillings are more than half mercury.

On the larger question of how great a problem mercury is in the environment and consumer products, close to half of all respondents (47%) say mercury is a significant problem -- including the plurality of 31% who say the problem is "very great." One in four respondents (26%) is neutral on the matter, and another one in five (20%) calls mercury a small problem, including 6% who say it is no problem at all.

A vast majority in all demographics (87%) support the Connecticut law requiring manufacturers to remove mercury from their products or withhold such products from the state market. Should the law be applied to fillings? Four in five (81%) say yes, including three in five (60%) who *strongly* favor enforcing the law this way. One in eight (12%) are opposed, including a whopping 45% of Hispanics and 21% of senior citizens.

Given a choice between higher cost mercury-free fillings and lower cost half-mercury fillings, an overwhelming 82% said they would pay more for fillings without mercury. Just one in ten (10%) said they would choose the cheaper filling.

Asked where they would most likely turn for answers on the medical effects of mercury, a majority (57%) say they would consult a doctor. About half that percentage (28%) say they would consult a dentist. Respondents generally prefer to get their medical information from a health care professional (46%), though a substantial 18% prefer to get this information from the Internet, and 8% prefer TV.

III. Narrative Analysis

4. Please tell me what ingredient you **most** associate with the filling material dentists generally use to fill teeth.

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Silver | 25% |
| Mercury | 13 |
| Both silver and mercury | 8 |
| *Other | 19 |
| Not sure | 35 |

***Other responses:** (Number in parentheses denotes frequency of similar response.)

Amalgam (18); Porcelain (11); Ceramic (6); Gold (6); Plastic (5); White filling (4); Aluminum (2); Composite (2); Epoxy (2); Resin (2); Acrylic; Concrete; Lead; Polymer; Quartz

One-fourth of respondents (25%) most associate silver with the filling material dentists generally use to fill teeth. One in eight (13%) associate mercury with this filling material, and 8% associate both silver and mercury. One-fifth of respondents (19%) associate other materials, while one in three (35%) are not sure.

Respondents who prefer to get their health information from the Internet are twice as likely as those who get their information from health care professionals (21% to 10%, respectively) to most associate mercury with the filling material dentists generally use to fill teeth. Republicans (19%) and 18- to 29-year-olds (22%) are also more likely than others to associate mercury with this material.

One-fourth of respondents in all age and both gender demographics most associate silver with the material used in fillings. The most likely to cite silver are high school graduates (45%), independent voters (30%), and people with annual household income of \$35,000–\$49,999 (43%). Over one-fourth of those who prefer to get their health information from health care professionals (28%) also name silver.

Approximately one-fourth of 30- to 49-year-olds and people with household income of \$50,000–\$74,999 name other ingredients.

Majorities of Hispanics (62%), African Americans (52%), and those who prefer to get their health information from television (74%) are not sure what fillings are made up. At least two-fifths of adults 50 and older, those with some college education, and those with a household income of \$50,000–\$74,999 are also not sure.

5. Would you say that silver dental fillings contain mercury or do not contain mercury, or don't you know?

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Do contain mercury | 40% |
| Do not contain mercury | 14 |
| Not sure/Don't know | 46 |

Two-fifths of respondents (40%) say that dental fillings do contain mercury, while one in seven (14%) say they do not. Almost half, however (46%), are not sure.

Majorities of Hispanics (62%), 50- to 64-year-olds (54%), and those who prefer to get their health information from TV (56%) say silver dental fillings *do* contain mercury. More than two-fifths of Republicans (48%), those who prefer to get their health information from health care professionals (43%), and those with a household income of \$50,000–\$74,999 (46%) agree.

Among the most likely to say that silver dental fillings *do not* contain mercury are independent voters (21%), residents of Southwest Connecticut (18%), 18- to 29-year-olds (27%), college graduates (17%), and those who prefer to get their health information from health care professionals (18%). None of the African American or Hispanic respondents are confident that silver fillings *do not* contain mercury.

Many respondents are not sure, including three-fourths of African Americans, two-thirds of people with a household income of \$15,000–\$49,999, three-fifths of 18- to 29-year-olds, and at least half of all Democrats, senior citizens, high school graduates, those residing outside the Southwest region, and people who prefer to get their health information from the Internet.

(Asked only of those who say silver fillings contain mercury)

6. *What percentage of mercury do you think is in silver fillings?*

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| Less than 10% | 18% |
| 10%-25% | 16 |
| 26%-50% | 9 |
| More than 50% | 2 |
| Not sure | 56 |

Nearly one-fifth of these respondents (18%) think that silver fillings are less than 10% mercury, and one in six (16%) estimate the mercury content at 10% to 25%. Nine percent think silver fillings are made up of 26% to 50% of mercury, and only 2% estimate the mercury content at more than 50%. More than half, though, are not sure (56%).

7. *On a scale of one to five, with one being not at all and five being very great, how much of a problem do you think mercury is in the environment and in consumer products?*

| | | | |
|--------------|----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1 Not at all | 6% | | |
| 2 | 14 | Small problem (1 + 2) | 20% |
| 3 | 26 | | |
| 4 | 16 | Large problem (4 + 5) | 47 |
| 5 Very great | 31 | | |
| Not sure | 7 | | |

Close to half (47%) think that mercury is a large problem in the environment and in consumer products. Furthermore, a plurality (31%) thinks this problem is very great (rating it a 5). One in four (26%) rates this problem a 3 on the scale. One-fifth (20%) considers it a small problem, including only 6% who say it is no problem at all (rating it a 1 on the scale).

One-half or more of people in several sub-groups rate this as a large problem (a 4 or 5 on the scale). These include Democrats, 50- to 64-year-olds, Hispanics (71%), African Americans, residents of Connecticut outside the Southwest region, those with some college education, respondents who prefer to get their health information from magazines (69%) or TV, men, and people with household income of \$25,000–\$34,999, \$35,000–\$49,999 (63%), and \$75,000 or more. In fact, two-fifths or more of people in most of these sub-groups say this problem is very great (rating it a 5).

The most likely to rate this as a small problem (a 1 or 2) are Republicans (30%), those who prefer to get their health information from the Internet (27%), and people with household income of \$50,000–\$74,999 (27%).

8. *Which of the following would you be more likely to choose given the option – higher cost fillings that contain no mercury or lower cost fillings that are about 50% mercury?*

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Higher cost/no mercury | 82% |
| Lower cost/with mercury | 10 |
| Not sure | 9 |

A vast majority of more than four in five (82%) would choose to pay a higher cost for fillings that contain no mercury, while only 10% would opt for the lower cost fillings that were made of approximately 50% mercury.

Three-fourths or more of people in most sub-groups would opt for higher cost fillings with no mercury. This includes at least nine out of ten 18- to 49-year-olds, adults with some college education, those who prefer to get their health information from newspapers, the Internet (94%), or books (100%), and people with household income less than \$15,000 and \$50,000–\$74,999 (97%).

Those for whom cost is a greater factor include African Americans (66%), high school graduates (62%), those who prefer to get their health information from TV (67%), and people with household income of \$15,000–\$24,999 (43%).

9. *Connecticut has a law that orders manufacturers to remove mercury from all products or not to sell products which contain mercury in the state. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this law?*

| | | | |
|------------------|-----|---------|-----|
| Strongly support | 62% | Support | 87% |
| Somewhat support | 25 | | |
| Somewhat oppose | 4 | | |
| Strongly oppose | 3 | Oppose | 7 |
| Not sure | 6 | | |

Most respondents (87%) support this law, with over three in five (62%) in strong support. Only 7% are opposed.

A large majority in every sub-group supports this law, including half or more across the board who gives strong support.

Fewer than 10% in almost every sub-group is opposed.

10. Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose applying Connecticut's anti-mercury law to ban mercury from dental fillings?

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----|--------|-----|
| Strongly favor | 60% | | |
| Somewhat favor | 21 | Favor | 81% |
| Somewhat oppose | 4 | | |
| Strongly oppose | 8 | Oppose | 12 |
| Not sure | 7 | | |

Four in five (81%) favor applying Connecticut's anti-mercury law to ban mercury from dental fillings. This includes three in five (60%) who are strongly in favor. One in eight (12%) are opposed, with 8% strongly opposed.

A large majority in all sub-groups is in favor, with a majority in each group strongly in favor.

Among the most likely to be opposed are Hispanics (45%), senior citizens (21%), adults with some college education (17%), residents of the Southwest region (16%), those who prefer to get their health information from TV (34%), people with household income of \$35,000–\$49,999 (27%), and men (19%).

11. If you were concerned about the health effects of mercury, which of the following health care professionals would you be **most** likely to see about your concerns?

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Medical doctor | 57% |
| Dentist | 28 |
| Clinical Nutritionist | 2 |
| Pharmacist | 2 |
| Registered Dietitian | 1 |
| Chiropractor | 1 |
| *Other | 7 |
| Not sure | 3 |

***Other:** A holistic medical doctor or information on the Internet; A naturopath doctor; A neurologist; All health-oriented people; Anyone; Attorney General of Connecticut; CDC website; General hygienist who tests for air quality and water; Lawyer; Legislator; Person who handles that product; Poison control center; Somebody who is an expert on the subject

A majority (57%) would most likely consult a medical doctor with concerns about health effects of mercury. Half as many (28%) would most likely consult a dentist.

In most sub-groups, a majority would most likely see a medical doctor for these concerns. Among the most likely are independent voters (63%) and 18- to 29-year-olds (63%). Intriguingly, , those who get their health information from TV or from friends and family (76% each) are more likely to say they would consult a doctor than are those who normally prefer to get their information from health care professionals (67%).

Senior citizens and high school graduates (37% each) are among the most likely to consult a dentist with concerns about the health effects of mercury.

12. How do you **prefer** to get your health information?

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Health care professional | 46% |
| Internet | 18 |
| TV | 8 |
| Magazines | 6 |
| Friends/Family | 4 |
| Newspaper | 4 |
| Books | 4 |
| Newsletters | 3 |
| Electronic magazines | 1 |
| Library | 1 |
| Other | 5 |
| Not sure | 2 |

Close to half (46%) prefer to get their health information from a health care professional. Nearly one in five (18%) prefers to get this information from the Internet, while 8% or fewer prefers each of the other sources.

A majority or plurality in most sub-groups prefer to get their health information from health care professionals. This includes 58% of Republicans and just over half of 30- to 49-year-olds, residents of the Southwest region, and people with household income of \$50,000 or more.

The most likely to prefer their health information from the Internet are 37% of people with household income of \$25,000–\$34,999, and one-fourth to one-fifth of Democrats, 18- to 49-year-olds, those living outside the Southwest region, adults with some college education, men, and people with household income of \$50,000–\$74,999.

Those who get their health information from television include one-sixth of adults with some college education, and one-eighth of 50- to 64-year-olds and residents of the Southwest region.