

Dental Mercury Banned



in Denmark, Norway & Sweden

It has long been rumoured that certain European countries were going to ban the use of silver amalgam fillings because of the mercury content. Well, it has finally happened. After several years of debate and discussion, Norway took the lead and announced that as of January 1, 2008 the production, importation, sale and use of substances containing mercury is prohibited.

Sweden introduced a similar ban that coincides with the Norwegian legislation, and Denmark was quick to follow suit with its ban taking effect as of April 1, 2008. It is anticipated that other European countries will soon be taking similar actions.

Norway cited environmental concerns as the prime reason for its decision, while the Swedish ban is for both environmental and health reasons. In Denmark, officials state they are confident that dental patients will be better off now because composite fillings (an alternative to mercury fillings) are so much stronger today and can now be used in many more situations than a few years ago.

Lobby groups, who have been petitioning Health Canada to ban amalgam fillings for several years, welcome the news and hope this new legislation in Europe will inspire our government to do the same.

However, not everyone agrees with the European decision as it relates to dentistry. Derek Jones, a biomaterials scientist from Dalhousie University in Halifax has denounced the ban as pandering to special interest groups rather than basing the legislation on good science.

In an editorial published in the February issue of the Journal of Scientific Research

Jones says "The public opinion on this issue has been modified by minority non-scientific views driven and supported by media sensationalism. Mobilization of irrational public fears is the strategy used by lobby groups to pressure governments to change public policy. It is important that government adhere to scientific principals and base health and environmental decisions on sound scientific knowledge."

It is clear that the controversy about the safety of dental amalgam is not going to be resolved any time soon. Even the dental community is split over this issue and there are numerous dentists around the world who have voluntarily eliminated mercury fillings from their practices while others continue to use the material with confidence that it's a safe cost effective way to restore teeth.

However as bans on dental mercury spread across Europe and possibly into North America, the question about silver fillings as a choice will eventually become a non-issue. Thankfully we do have excellent alternatives to amalgam. The down side is that these alternative materials are more costly, and require more time and precision to place making their success very vulnerable to technique and skill. Dentists who are not used to working with these materials are going to face a bit of a learning curve as they adjust.

Yours for better dental health,

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