

How are plants and animals exposed to metals in their environment?

Plants and animals can be exposed to metals in their environment in a number of ways. These include:

- **ingestion** (consumption of food, water, soil, etc.),
- **inhalation** (breathing in), or
- **dermal contact** (absorbed through the skin)

Exposure through the skin is very rare for birds and mammals, because feathers and fur limit skin contact with chemicals. Breathing in metals is also rare, because the metals we are examining in this study are heavy, and do not easily stay in the air. Ingestion of metals through food, water and soil does play a big role in exposure, and will be the biggest focus of the ecological risk assessment work.

