
Lead and Drinking Water

What You Need to Know



What is lead and where is it found?

Lead is a naturally occurring element found in the earth's crust. Lead can be found in all parts of our environment – air, soil, water, and even inside our homes.

Federal and state regulatory standards have helped to reduce the amount of lead in air, drinking water, soil, consumer products, food, and occupational settings.

How does lead get into my drinking water?

Lead can enter drinking water through corrosion of plumbing materials, especially when the water has high acidity or low mineral content that corrodes pipes and fixtures. Homes built before 1986 are at a higher risk to have lead pipes, fixtures, and solder, however, new homes can also be at risk. The amount of lead in water depends on the type and amount of minerals in the water, how long the water stays in the pipes, amount of wear in the pipes, water's acidity, and its temperature.

What are health concerns from lead exposure?

Children and pregnant women are especially vulnerable to the effects from lead exposure. Lead exposure can cause premature birth, reduce birth weight, delay physical and mental development in babies and young children, and cause learning disabilities in children. In adults, lead exposure can cause serious damage to the brain, nervous system, kidneys and red blood cells. Lifetime exposure to high levels of lead can potentially cause stroke, or kidney disease.

How do I know if there is lead in my water supply?

If you suspect your home's plumbing could contain lead pipes or lead-based solder, you should have your water tested. Testing your water is the only way to detect lead in your drinking water since you cannot see, taste or smell lead in water.

If you are on a municipal water system, your water is tested for lead and other potential contaminants. A Consumer Confidence Report that includes testing results is sent annually to water users. You can obtain a copy of your report by contacting your water supplier. If the lead is above 15 parts per billion (ppb) in municipal water supply, the supplier is required to inform the public.

A list of local laboratories that test for lead can be found here: http://michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-rrd-Lab-ChemistryLabsListCertifications_429759_7.pdf. Contact a testing lab before having your water tested to obtain specific instructions for how you will collect, store and transport the sample(s) you get from your home. There is a cost for having drinking water tested.

What can I do to reduce lead in my drinking water?

If your water test indicates your tap water has lead levels above the EPA's action level of 15 ppb, there are several things you can consider to reduce the risk of lead exposure in your drinking water:

- **Flush your cold-water pipes** by running the water for approximately 5 minutes. The longer the water has been sitting in the pipes, the more lead it may contain. You can fill containers for later use, after the flushing process.
- **Use only water from the cold-water tap for drinking, cooking, and especially for making baby formula.** Hot water is likely to contain higher levels of lead.
- **You may choose to install a water filter that is NSF-certified for lead removal.** If a water filter is installed, replace filters at least as often as recommended by the manufacturer. **Check and confirm in the packaging materials that the filter is certified for lead removal by the NSF international at <http://nsf.org>**
- **Do not boil water** to remove lead. Boiling will not remove the lead.
- **Use bottled water** for drinking and cooking. Commercially prepared bottled water that meets federal and state drinking water standards are recommended.
- **Buy a lead-free faucet.** Faucets marked with "NSF 61/9" and/or "California Proposition 65" meet stricter limits than "lead-free."

Who do I contact for more information?

The local water authority is always your first source for testing and identifying lead contamination in your tap water. For more detailed information on Lead contamination, please call the Oakland County Health Division Nurse on Call at 1-800-848-5533 or visit:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov>
- United States Environmental Protection Agency <http://www.epa.gov>
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality <http://www.michigan.gov/deq/>
- NSF International <http://www.nsf.org/consumer-resources/what-is-nsf-certification/>



NURSE ON CALL PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION HOTLINE
800.848.5533 NOC@OAKGOV.COM
OAKGOV.COM/HEALTH



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