

Lead in Water Frequently Asked Questions

Why should I be concerned about lead in drinking water?

Even small amounts of lead can cause learning and behavior problems in children. At very high blood levels lead poisoning can be fatal.

Children under the age of six and the developing fetus are especially vulnerable to health problems from exposure to lead, including elevated lead in drinking water.

Infants who drink formula prepared with lead-contaminated water are especially at risk because their brains are rapidly developing and because they consume large volumes of formula relative to their body size.

In addition to drinking water, other important sources of exposure are peeling lead-based paint and lead contaminated dust, lead-contaminated soil, toys, cosmetics, pottery, and take home lead from some occupations.

How does lead get into my drinking water?

Some parts of the plumbing system may contain lead. These include most faucets, and some solders, fittings, connectors, and pipes. In older homes the service connector pipe from the water main to the home may be made of lead. Drinking water that comes in contact with these materials, which may be present in your home, high rise building, or the city's water distribution system may be contaminated with lead.

Lead is rarely found in source water (groundwater or surface water) used for drinking water.

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

Flush your water pipes before drinking or drawing water for cooking by running the water until it reaches the coldest temperature possible. This may take only a few seconds if water use in your home was heavy recently (i.e. showering), or it could take longer than a few minutes if the water sat in the pipes overnight (5 minutes).

Use only the cold-water tap for drinking, cooking, and especially for making baby formula.

How do I know if my tap water is contaminated with lead?

The only way to know is to test your water. You cannot see, taste, or smell lead in water.

Testing the water is especially important for apartment dwellers, because flushing may not be effective in high-rise buildings.

How do I test my water for lead?

Contact your local health department or water supplier as some provide lead testing at no or low cost. Use a state-accredited laboratory. You can find one at

http://publicapps.odh.ohio.gov/Envlicense_Reports/External_License_Search.aspx?Program=Lead

Water test kits available at local hardware stores are NOT recommended by the EPA.

Are faucet or pitcher water filter devices effective at removing lead?

Some faucet-mounted devices effectively remove both soluble and particulate lead, but most pour-through water pitcher devices are not effective at removing the particulate lead.

How can I find a pitcher or faucet device to remove soluble and particulate lead from my water?

Go to the NSF WEB page to verify the effectiveness of the system you want to purchase.

<http://info.nsf.org/Certified/DWTU/>

Resources and References

US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Safe Drinking Water Hot Line for lead:

1-800-426-4791

US EPA Health Effects of Lead:

<http://www.epa.gov/lead#health>

CDC Lead in Drinking Water

<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/leadinwater/>