



## FAQs: Lead in Tap Water

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**What are some reasons I should test my tap water for lead? What would prompt me to suspect that I may have lead in my tap water?**

Some examples of potential sources of lead in drinking water are:

- Lead pipes in plumbing
  - ◇ Dull gray in color and will appear shiny when scratched
  - ◇ Banned since 1986 and not widely used since the 1930s
- Copper pipes joined by lead solder
  - ◇ Solder will be dull gray in color and will appear shiny when scratched
  - ◇ Banned since 1986 and many communities banned prior to 1986
- Brass pipes, faucets, fittings and valves
  - ◇ May contain alloys of lead
- Sediments in screens on faucets
  - ◇ Debris from plumbing can collect on screens and may contain lead
- Water service line to facility is made of lead
  - ◇ Pipes that carry water from the municipal water system main to the facility may contain lead
- Water fountains in the facility may contain lead parts
  - ◇ Specific brands of water fountains contain lead parts or have lead lined water tanks
  - ◇ Since 1988 it has been mandated that water fountains be lead free but older facilities may have outdated models.
- If your water comes from a private well and has not been tested for lead

**Do I still need to test my water if I have all new pipes? Do I still need to test my water if I'm in a brand new building?**

**Yes.** Lead still can be present in new pipes and fittings. “Lead free” brass plumbing parts for drinking water lines can contain up to [8% lead](#) by weight. In one new building, two shut-off valves leached toxic amounts of lead into the building’s drinking fountains. The valves were found to be about 6.5% lead.

The most common problem is with brass or chrome-plated brass faucets and fixtures. These can leach high amounts of lead into the water, especially hot water.

According to an EPA document: “Lead-contaminated drinking water is most often a problem in houses that are either very old or very new. . . Scientific data indicate that the newer the home, the greater the risk of lead contamination. Lead levels decrease as a building ages. This is because, as time passes, mineral deposits form a coating on the inside of the pipes (if the water is not corrosive). This coating insulates the water from the solder. But, during the first five years (before the coating forms) water is in direct contact with the lead. More likely than not, water in buildings less than five years old has high levels of lead contamination.”

(Additionally, many new homes are made of copper pipes, and copper may also leach into the water. Some people who drink water containing elevated levels of copper may, with short term exposure, experience gastrointestinal distress, and with long-term exposure may experience liver or kidney damage. See <http://water.epa.gov/drink/contaminants/basicinformation/copper.cfm>.)

## How do I have my water tested?

- If you receive your water from a public system: You can contact your water system about getting your home or facility tested. Your water system may be able to test your water for lead or refer you to an EPA accredited lab in your State.
- If your drinking water comes from a non-public water system (such as a well): You alone are responsible for assuring that your water is safe. EPA recommends routine testing of your water for common contaminants, including lead. For more information on private wells, visit: <http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/well/index.cfm>.

We recommend that you use an EPA-accredited lab in your state to test the water at your tap for lead (and possibly other contaminants). You can find a lab here: <http://water.epa.gov/scitech/drinkingwater/labcert/statecertification.cfm>.

This information can also be obtained by calling EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline:

## Why does EHCC, which is committed to practical, and free or low-cost, practices for child care, urge us to incur this cost ?

We now know that there is no safe level of lead exposure for children. This calls for an even greater emphasis on preventing lead exposures whenever possible. One way to do so is to make sure that your tap water does not have unsafe levels of lead.

A facility where the tap water has high levels of lead puts every child in the facility at risk. Since every child would be drinking the water they would ingest the lead.

For example, infants consuming formula

prepared with lead-contaminated water may be at particular risk. They consume a large amount of water relative to their body size.

EHCC is committed to helping child care professionals be frugal as they create healthier environments. Our even greater commitment is to assure that no child is placed at risk from such a preventable and unsafe exposure.

Unfortunately, the only way to assure that tap water is not contaminated with lead is to test it. That's why Caring for our Children recommends that "Drinking water, including water in drinking fountains, should be tested and evaluated in accordance with the assistance of the local health authority or state drinking water program to determine whether lead and copper levels are safe." (CFOC 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Standard 5.2.6)

Please visit <http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/drinkingwater/schools/guidance.cfm> for more information on testing child care centers for lead in drinking water.

## Does it make a difference if my water comes from a public utility or if it comes from a well?

Lead contamination often comes from the building's plumbing components, not from the source water.

## What about other harmful chemicals in tap water? How can I find out more?

Other harmful chemicals have been found in tap water.

- **If you receive your water from a public system:** You should receive an annual water quality report, also known as a Consumer Confidence Report. This report is often sent with your water bill once a year in July. The report might contain information about other contaminants in the community water supply that you may want to have checked at your tap.

- **If your drinking water comes from a non-public public water system (such as a well):** According to the US EPA, if your drinking water does not come from a public water system, or you get your drinking water from a household well, you alone are responsible for assuring that it is safe. For this reason, routine testing for a few of the most common contaminants is highly recommended. Visit <http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/well/index.cfm> for more information.

The contaminants of greatest concern, in addition to lead, include harmful bacteria, nitrates, and arsenic.

### What happens if I find elevated levels of lead in my water?

Here is some advice from the US EPA:

- **Flush your pipes before drinking, and only use cold water for cooking and drinking.** Flush your pipes before drinking, and only use cold water for cooking and drinking. The more time water has been sitting in your home's pipes, the more lead it may contain. Anytime the water in a particular faucet has not been used for six hours or longer, "flush" your cold-water pipes by running the water. Flushing times can vary based on the plumbing configuration in your home and whether your home has a lead service line. Single family homes with a lead service line will typically require longer flushing times than homes without a lead service line. To conserve water, showering, running the dishwasher or the washing machine will also flush the pipes. After this type of heavy water use, make sure you also flush the tap that you will use for drinking or cooking by running the water to clear the rest of the home plumbing to that tap.. Once you have done this, fill a container with water from that tap and store it in the refrigerator for drinking and cooking throughout the day. If you are

unsure of what an appropriate flushing time for your home is, contact your water utility. **Please note that flushing may not be effective in high-rise buildings.**

- **Never cook with or consume water from the hot-water tap.** Hot water dissolves more lead more quickly than cold water. So, do not use water taken from the hot tap for cooking or drinking, and especially not for making baby formula. (If you need hot water, draw water from the cold tap and heat it on the stove.) Use only thoroughly flushed water from the cold tap for any consumption.
- **Consider replacing lead-containing plumbing fixtures.** If you are considering this, keep in mind that the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) requires that only lead-free pipe, solder, or flux may be used in the installation or repair of a public water system, or any plumbing in residential or non-residential facility providing water for human consumption.
  - ◇ "Lead-free" under the SDWA means:
    - \* solders and flux may not contain more than 0.2 percent lead, and
    - \* pipe, pipe fittings, and well pumps may not contain more than 8.0 percent lead.

SDWA also requires that kitchen and bathroom faucets (and other fittings and fixtures intended to dispense water for human consumption) meet a lead leaching standard. Those fittings and fixtures should be certified according to [NSF/ANSI Standard 61 for lead reduction](http://bit.ly/1rhXDVG) (<http://bit.ly/1rhXDVG>). Beginning January 2014, the maximum allowable lead content of pipes, pipe fittings, plumbing fittings, and fixtures will be reduced even further, to 0.25 percent.
- **Consider alternative sources or treatment of water.** If you discover that you have high levels of lead in your home, you should consider using bottled water or a point of use water treatment unit. (see below for information on treatment devices)

## What about water treatment devices?

Here is some advice from the US EPA:

There are many devices which are certified for effective lead reduction, but devices that are not designed to remove lead will not work.

A number of cartridge type filtering devices are available. These devices use various types of filtering media, including carbon, ion exchange resins, activated alumina and other privately marketed products. Unless they have been certified against either [NSF/ANSI Standard 53 or 58 for lead removal \(http://bit.ly/1umSDEu\)](http://bit.ly/1umSDEu), the effectiveness of these devices to reduce lead exposure at the tap can vary greatly. It is highly recommended that before purchasing a filter, you verify the claim made by the vendor.

If you bought a filter, you should replace the filter periodically as specified by the manufacturer. Failure to do so may result in exposure to elevated lead levels.

Here are suggested recommendations before purchasing any device:

- Avoid being misled by false claims and scare tactics. Research the reputation and legitimacy of the company or sales representative.
- Avoid signing contracts or binding agreements for "onetime offers" or for those that place a lien on your home. Be very careful about giving credit card information over the phone. Check into any offers that involve prizes or sweepstakes winnings.
- Verify the claims of manufacturers by contacting the NSF International or the Water Quality Association.

## I use a water pitcher or point of use treatment unit (filter in main water line). Do I still need to run my water before I use it?

If you use a filter to remove lead, be sure the product is certified against either [NSF/ANSI Standard 53 or 58 for lead removal \(http://bit.ly/1umSDEu\)](http://bit.ly/1umSDEu).

You will need to follow instructions and to maintain it according to the manufacturer's instructions.

A point of use device will filter out lead at the tap, therefore running water prior to use is not necessary. If you use a 'water pitcher' type filter, you will need to check the instructions or to check with the manufacturer about appropriate use.

## Where can I get more information?

For more information, visit:

<http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/drinkingwater/schools/guidance.cfm#sdwa>

and

[www.epa.gov/safewater/lead](http://www.epa.gov/safewater/lead)

or call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

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### Eco-Healthy Child Care®

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