



PROTECTING YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FROM LEAD

The New York State Health Department, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene are concerned about lead in your drinking water. Although most New York City homes have very low levels of lead in their drinking water, some homes in the community have lead levels above the action level of 15 parts per billion, or 0.015 milligrams of lead per liter of water. Under the State Sanitary Code, New York City has had a program in place to minimize lead in your drinking water since 1992. This program includes corrosion control treatment and public education. The City is also required to replace any lead service line it controls if the line contributes lead concentrations of more than 15 parts per billion. If you have any questions about how we are carrying out the requirements of the lead regulation please call 311. This pamphlet explains the simple steps you can take to protect you and your family by reducing your exposure to lead in drinking water.

HEALTH EFFECTS OF LEAD

Lead is a common metal found throughout the environment in lead-based paint, air, soil, household dust, food, and certain types of pottery, porcelain, pewter and water. Lead can pose a significant risk to your health if too much of it enters your body. Lead builds up in the body over many years and can cause damage to the brain, red blood cells and kidneys. The greatest risk is to young children and pregnant women. Amounts of lead that won't hurt adults can slow down normal mental and physical development of growing bodies. In New York City, the primary source of childhood lead poisoning is lead dust from peeling and chipping leaded paint. Also, a child at play often comes into contact with sources of lead contamination, like dirt and dust that rarely affect an adult. It is important to wash children's hands and toys often, and try to make sure they only put food into their mouths.

Although rarely the sole cause of lead poisoning, lead in drinking water can significantly increase a person's total lead exposure, particularly the exposure of infants who drink baby formulas and concentrated juices that are mixed with water. It is estimated that drinking water can make up to 20 percent or more of a person's total exposure to lead.

LEAD IN YOUR PLUMBING SYSTEM

Lead is unusual among drinking water contaminants in that it seldom occurs naturally in rivers and lakes, and the water that comes out of the City's upstate reservoirs is virtually lead-free. Lead enters drinking water primarily because of the corrosion, or wearing away, of materials containing lead in the water distribution system and household plumbing. These materials include lead-based solder used to join copper pipes, brass and chrome plated brass faucets, and, at times, pipes made of lead that connect your house to the water main (service lines). In 1986, Congress banned the use of lead solder containing greater than 0.2 percent lead, and restricted the lead content of faucets, pipes and other plumbing materials to 8.0 percent.

When water stands in lead pipes or plumbing systems containing lead for several hours or more, the lead may dissolve into your drinking water. This means the first water drawn from the tap in the morning, or later in the afternoon after returning from work or school, can contain high levels of lead.

SHIELDING THE WATER FROM LEAD

New York City is adding food grade phosphoric acid to the water supply and maintaining a targeted pH to keep lead from dissolving in the water. The pH is adjusted to reduce the corrosivity of the water. The phosphoric acid creates a protective film on pipes that reduces the release of metals such as lead from household plumbing.

REDUCING YOUR EXPOSURE TO LEAD IN DRINKING WATER

Despite our best efforts to control corrosion, lead levels in some homes or buildings can be high. To find out whether you need to take action in your own home, have your drinking water tested to determine if it contains excessive concentrations of lead. Testing the water is essential because you cannot see, taste, or smell lead in drinking water. Call the City at 311 to request a free water test for lead.

If a water test shows that the drinking water drawn from a tap in your home contains lead above 15 parts per billion, then you should take the following precautions:

RUN YOUR TAP

▶ Let the water run from the tap before using it for drinking or cooking any time the water in a faucet has stood for more than six hours. The longer water resides in your home's plumbing the more lead it may contain.

Flushing the tap means running the cold water faucet until the water gets noticeably colder, usually about 15 to 30 seconds. If your house has a lead service line to the water main, you may have to flush the water for a longer time, perhaps one or more minutes, before drinking. Although toilet flushing or showering flushes water through a portion of your home's plumbing system, you still need to flush the water in each faucet before using it for drinking or cooking. Flushing tap water is a simple and inexpensive measure you can take to protect your family's health. It usually uses less than one or two gallons of water and costs less than 12¢ per month.

To conserve water, fill a couple of bottles for drinking water after flushing the tap, and whenever possible use the first flush water to wash dishes, water plants or for other purposes that do not involve cooking and drinking. If you live in a high rise building, letting the water flow before using it may not work to lessen your risk from lead. The plumbing systems have more and sometimes larger pipes than smaller buildings. Ask your landlord for help in locating the source of lead and for advice on reducing the lead level.

USE COLD WATER FOR COOKING

▶ Do not cook with or drink hot tap water. Hot water can dissolve lead more quickly than cold water. If you need hot water, draw water from the cold water tap and heat it on the stove.

CHECK YOUR PLUMBING

▶ Remove loose lead solder and debris from the plumbing by removing the faucet strainers from all taps and running the water from 3 to 5 minutes. Thereafter, periodically remove the strainers and flush out any debris that has accumulated.

▶ If your copper pipes are joined with lead solder that has been installed illegally since it was banned in 1986, notify the plumber who did the work and request replacement of the lead solder with lead-free solder. Also, notify the City at 311 about the violation. Lead solder looks dull gray, and when scratched with a metal object looks shiny.

▶ Determine whether the service line that connects your home or apartment to the water main is made of

lead. The Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations of the Department of Environmental Protection keeps records of connections to City water mains and may be able to provide you with this information. If they do not have any records concerning your service line, try to contact the plumbing contractor who installed the service line. You usually can identify the plumbing contractor by checking with the NYC Department of Buildings office in your borough, which maintains records of building permits and related documents dealing with building construction. If the plumbing contractor can't be located, hire a licensed plumber to determine if the service line is made of lead. A licensed plumber can also check to see if your home's plumbing contains lead solder, lead pipes or pipe fittings that contain lead.

▶ If a service line that connects a dwelling or other structure to a water main contributes more than 15 parts per billion of lead to drinking water, and the service line is owned by the City, the City is required to replace the service line as part of a regularly scheduled City-wide lead service line replacement program. If a service line is partially owned by the City, the City is required to replace the portion of the service line owned by the City, to provide homeowners with information on how to replace the portion of the service line that they own, and to offer to replace the portion of the service line owned by the homeowner at the homeowner's expense and to take a follow-up tap sample within 14 days after the replacement. Acceptable pipe alternatives include copper, steel and iron. In general, the City owns the service lines that connect City-owned buildings and other structures to a water main. The City does not own the service lines that connect non-City-owned buildings or structures to a water main.

CHECK HOME WIRING

▶ Have an electrician check your wiring. If grounding wires from the electrical system are attached to your pipes, corrosion may be greater. Check with the electrician or your local electrical code to determine if your wiring can be grounded elsewhere. DO NOT attempt to change the wiring yourself because improper grounding can cause electrical shock and fire hazards.

311

Dial 311 for all NYC Non-emergency Government Information and Services



www.nyc.gov/dep

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor
David B. Tweedy, Acting Commissioner

ADDITIONAL PROTECTION

The steps described above will reduce the lead concentrations in your drinking water. However, if a water test shows that the drinking water coming from your tap contains lead concentrations more than 15 parts per billion after flushing and after we have completed our actions to minimize lead levels, then you may want to take the following additional measures:

- ▶ Purchase or lease a home water treatment device to remove lead. Home treatment devices are limited because each unit treats only the water that flows from the faucet to which it is connected, and all of the devices require periodic maintenance and replacement. Devices such as reverse osmosis systems or distillers can effectively remove lead from your drinking water. Some activated carbon filters may reduce lead levels at the tap, however, all lead reduction claims should be investigated. Be sure to check the actual performance of a specific home treatment device before and after installing the unit.
- ▶ You can also purchase, for drinking and cooking, bottled water that is certified by the New York State Department of Health.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

You can consult a variety of sources for additional information. Your family doctor or pediatrician can perform a blood test for lead and provide you with information about the health effects of lead. You can call 311 to request that the City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene provide you with information about the health effects of lead and how to have your child's blood tested for lead. You can also call 311 to request that the Department of Buildings provide you with information about building permit records that should contain the names of plumbing contractors that plumbed your home. And, you can call 311 to request that the Department of Environmental Protection send you a fact sheet about lead in drinking water or to request a free water test for lead.

The Department of Environmental Protection would be pleased to answer any additional questions you may have concerning lead in drinking water. To reach DEP or any of these agencies, or to get more information about New York City's government and services, please call 311 or visit www.nyc.gov.

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