

LEAD IN DRINKING WATER AT HOME



How does lead get into tap water? Typically, lead gets into your water after the water leaves your local treatment plant or your well. That is, the source of lead in your home's water is most likely pipe or solder in your home's own plumbing. The most common cause is corrosion, a reaction between the water and the lead pipes or solder. Dissolved oxygen, low pH (acidity) and low mineral content in water are common causes of corrosion. All kinds of water, however, may have high levels of lead.

What are the health effects of lead in drinking water? The health effects of lead are most severe for infants and children. For infants and children, exposure to high levels of lead in drinking water can result in delays in physical or mental development. For adults, it can result in kidney problems or high blood pressure. Although the main sources of exposure to lead are ingesting paint chips and inhaling dust, EPA estimates that 10 to 20 percent of human exposure to lead may come from lead in drinking water. Infants who consume mostly mixed formula can receive 40 to 60 percent of their exposure to lead from drinking water.

How can I reduce lead in drinking water at home? Flush your pipes before drinking, and only use cold water for consumption. 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 until it becomes as cold as it will get. (This could take as little as five to thirty seconds if there has been recent heavy water use such as showering or toilet flushing. Otherwise, it could take two minutes or longer.) The more time water has been sitting in your home's pipes, the more lead it may contain.

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. The two actions recommended above are very important to the health of your family. They will probably be effective in reducing lead levels because most of the lead in household water usually comes from the plumbing in your house, not from the local water supply.

Actions You Can Take To Reduce Lead In Drinking Water

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Have Your Water Tested After you have taken the two precautions above for reducing the lead in water used for drinking or cooking, have your water tested. The only way to be sure of the amount of lead in your household water is to have it tested by a competent laboratory. Your water supplier may be able to offer information or assistance with testing. Testing is especially important for apartment dwellers, because flushing may not be effective in high-rise buildings with lead-soldered central piping.

continued on page 10

How can I tell if my water contains too much lead?

You should have your water tested for lead by a certified laboratory. (Lists are available from your state or local drinking water authority). Testing costs between \$20 and \$100. Since you cannot see, taste, or smell lead dissolved in water, testing is the only sure way of telling whether or not there are harmful quantities of lead in your drinking water. You should be particularly suspicious if your home has lead pipes (lead is a dull gray metal that is soft enough to be easily scratched with a house key), if you see signs of corrosion (frequent leaks, rust-colored water, stained dishes or laundry, or if your non-plastic plumbing is less than five years old. Your water supplier may have useful information, including whether or not the service connector used in your home or area is made of lead. Testing is especially important in high-rise buildings where flushing might not work.

Should I be concerned about lead in drinking water in my child's school or day care center? Children spend a significant part of their days at school or in a child care facility. The faucets that provide water used for consumption, including drinking, cooking lunch, and preparing juice and infant formula, should be tested.

What are the legal limits regarding lead and drinking water? Lead and copper are regulated by a treatment technique that requires systems to control the corrosiveness of their water. If more than 10% of tap water samples exceed the action level of 15 parts per billion, water systems must take additional steps to reduce corrosivity.



Consumer Information (800) 424-LEAD

Safe Drinking Water Hotline (800) 426-4791

Technical Information 202-554-1404

