

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Reducing Exposure to Lead in Drinking Water: Everyone Has a Role

Important information about lead

Lead can cause serious health problems if too much enters your body from drinking water or other sources. It can cause damage to the brain and kidneys, and can interfere with the production of red blood cells that carry oxygen to all parts of your body. The greatest risk of lead exposure is to infants, young children, and pregnant women. Scientists have linked the effects of lead on the brain with lowered IQ in children. Adults with kidney problems and high blood pressure can be affected by low levels of lead more than healthy adults. Lead is stored in the bones, and it can be released later in life. During pregnancy, the child receives lead from the mother's bones, which may affect brain development.

Here's how these organizations work to reduce your exposure to lead in drinking water:



Washington Aqueduct

- Very low lead levels in source and treated water (often, no lead is detected in source or treated water)
- Corrosion control treatment (maintains constant pH – a measure of acidity - and adds orthophosphate)
- Monitors to ensure water is minimally corrosive as it leaves the treatment plants
- Reports results to EPA



D.C. Water and Sewer Authority

- Monitors at locations most likely to have lead problems to determine effectiveness of the corrosion control treatment
- Replaces public lead service lines when homeowners replace private lines, or in conjunction with road or water system repairs
- Participates in national research studies
- Reports results to EPA

What is EPA's role?



EPA:

- ...reviews treatment processes, monitoring plans, and results to determine effectiveness of corrosion control
- ...develops regulations and guidance
- ...performs and funds corrosion research
- ...maintains a website on lead in DC drinking water (www.epa.gov/dclead)
- ...provides technical assistance to Washington Aqueduct, DCWASA, and other District agencies
- ...reviews outreach and publications from DC water systems, as requested



Here are steps you can take to further reduce your exposure to lead in drinking water:

- Before using water for drinking or cooking - especially if the water has been sitting unused for several hours - let the water run from your tap until it is as cold as it will get. *This may take up to 2 minutes.*
- Use only cold water for drinking and cooking
- Heat cold water on the stove or in the microwave for preparing infant formula
- Periodically, remove and clean the strainer/aerator device on your faucets
- Purchase faucets and other plumbing fixtures/fittings with the lowest lead content possible that are certified by an independent testing agency, such as NSF International
- Replace leaded pipes and plumbing (including private portions of lead service lines)

If you have specific concerns:

- Request water sampling kits from a certified laboratory to measure lead-in-water levels
- Talk with your health care provider about blood lead testing and other health questions

More information is available at:
www.epa.gov/dclead

**EPA Region 3
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