State of Illinois
Illinois Department of Public Health

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
FACT SHEET

Lead in Drinking Water

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY TAP WATER IS CONTAMINATED WITH LEAD?

The only way to know whether your tap water contains lead is to have it tested. You cannot see, taste, or smell dissolved lead in drinking water. Contact IDPH or your local health department for information about how to test for lead in drinking water.

For homes served by a community water system, an annual water quality report called a Consumer Confidence Report should be available from your water utility. Contact your water utility if you'd like to receive a copy.

For homes served by a household well or other private water supply, contact your local health department for more information on contaminants of concern in your area.

Even if your water utility provides water to your home that does not contain lead, it can still get into your water through sources in your home's plumbing system.

When testing your water for lead you should use an Illinois EPA certified laboratory. A list of IEPA-accredited laboratories can be found at:
https://www2.illinois.gov/epa/topics/certification-training/lab-accreditation/Pages/accredited-labs.aspx.

HOW DOES LEAD GET INTO DRINKING WATER?

- Homes built before 1987 are more likely to contain faucets, fixtures, fittings, pipes, solder, and flux containing lead.
- Lead can enter drinking water through plumbing materials including: corroded lead service lines, brass fixtures, chrome-plated brass faucets, galvanized pipe, and fixtures or piping with lead solder
- Lead service lines can contribute as much as 50% to 75% of the lead found in drinking water.
- Contaminated source water is possible but not a common source of lead in water

DOES LEAD IN WATER CAUSE HEALTH EFFECTS?

- CDC has stated that "No safe blood level has been identified and all sources of lead exposure for children should be controlled or eliminated".
- Lead is persistent and can accumulate in the body over time.
- Drinking water is one possible source of lead exposure. USEPA estimates that drinking water can make up 20% or more of a person's total exposure to lead. Infants who consume mostly mixed formula can receive 40% to 60% of their exposure from drinking water.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I THINK MY CHILD OR I HAVE BEEN EXPOSED?

If you think that you or your child has been exposed to lead in water, contact your health care provider. Most children and adults who are exposed to lead have no symptoms. The only way to tell if you or your child has been exposed is with a blood lead test. Your health care provider can help you decide whether a blood lead test is needed and can also recommend appropriate follow-up actions if you or your child has been exposed. As levels of lead in the blood increase, adverse effects from lead may also increase.

WHAT CAN I DO TO REDUCE OR ELIMINATE EXPOSURES TO LEAD IN TAP WATER?

Removing all sources of lead and following best practices to reduce lead in water is the best strategy to reduce exposure to lead in drinking water.

Best Practices to Reduce Lead in Water:

- Use only cold water for drinking, cooking, and making baby formula. Boiling water does not remove lead from water.
- Remove or regularly clean faucet aerators. The small screen can trap sediments containing lead.
- Before using water for cooking or drinking, flush cold water through the fixture for 1-2 minutes or as otherwise directed by your water utility, local health department or IDPH.

Long-term Strategies:

- Replace plumbing materials such as fixtures, piping, fittings, and service lines containing lead with other lead free materials approved under the Illinois Plumbing Code.
- Prioritize replacement of fixtures by frequency of use for cooking, drinking, and making baby formula.
- Even after replacement, always follow best practices.

Temporary Strategies:

- Follow all best practices to reduce lead in water.
- You may also use bottled water that has been certified by an independent testing organization for cooking and drinking. This may not be the most cost-effective option for long-term use.
- Consider using point-of-use filters certified for lead removal (NSF 53 and NSF 42). Information regarding filter selection may be found at: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2018-12/documents/consumer_tool_for_identifying_drinking_water_filters_certified_to_reduce_lead.pdf. After installation, filters should be maintained and replaced in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations and specifications.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Illinois Department of Public Health
Division of Environmental Health
525 W. Jefferson St.
Springfield, IL 62761

E-mail: dph.leadh2o.gov

http://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/environmental-health-protection

217-782-5830

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