
LEAD AND DRINKING WATER

What You Need to Know



MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES DIVISION

WHAT IS LEAD?

Lead is a naturally occurring element found in small amounts in the earth's crust. Lead can be found in all parts of our environment – air, soil, water, and even inside our homes. While it has some beneficial uses, it can be toxic to humans and animals causing negative health effects including premature birth, low birth weight, physical and mental delays, kidney disease and nervous system damage.

LEAD IN DRINKING WATER

Lead can enter drinking water through corrosion of plumbing materials, especially where the water has high acidity or low mineral content that corrodes pipes and fixtures. Homes built before 1986 are more likely to have lead pipes, fixtures and solder. However, new homes are also at risk: even legally "lead-free" plumbing may contain up to eight percent lead. The most common problem is with brass or chrome-plated brass faucets and fixtures with lead solder, from which significant amounts of lead can enter into the water, especially hot water.

Corrosion is a dissolving or wearing away of metal caused by a chemical reaction between water and your plumbing. A number of factors are involved in the extent to which lead enters the water including the chemistry of the water (acidity and alkalinity), the amount of lead it comes into contact with, how long the water stays in the plumbing materials, and the presence of protective scales or coatings inside the plumbing materials.

TESTING FOR LEAD

If you suspect you may have a lead issue, you should have your system tested. Residents with private water wells should contact their local health department for testing options.

If you are on municipal water, your water supply is tested for lead and other potential contaminants. Your water supplier/municipality issues a Consumer Confidence Report annually that details all testing results. If homeowners are interested in testing their own water they can contact a lab and have their water tested. A list of laboratories in Michigan certified for lead testing can be found at http://michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-rrd-Lab-ChemistryLabsListCertifications_429759_7.pdf

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WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE LEAD IN DRINKING WATER?

- ◆ Flush your faucets by running the water for approximately 5 minutes;
 - ◆ Use only cold water for drinking, cooking, and making baby formula;
 - ◆ You may wish to install a water filter that is NSF-certified for lead removal. Just remember that all filters need maintenance and periodic replacement. Information regarding NSF certifications can be found at www.nsf.org
 - ◆ Buy lead-free faucets. Lead-free faucets marked with “NSF 61/9” and/or “California Proposition 65” meet stricter limits than “lead free”
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WHERE CAN I OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION?

- ◆ Your local municipality/water supplier
- ◆ Macomb County Health Department, Environmental Health Division (586) 469-5236
- ◆ Michigan Department of Environmental Quality <http://michigan.gov/deq>
- ◆ Environmental Protection Agency <http://www.epa.gov/lead>