



Fact Sheet

Lead

- Lead is a common, naturally occurring metal found throughout the environment.
- Drinking water is rarely the sole cause of lead poisoning. The [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) estimates that 10 to 20 percent of human exposure to lead may come from drinking water. However, infants drinking mixed formula can receive 40 to 60 percent of their exposure from drinking water.
- 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, pregnant women, and developing fetuses. Amounts of lead that won't hurt adults can slow down normal mental and physical development of growing bodies.
- Lead seldom occurs naturally in water supplies like rivers and lakes. Lead enters drinking water primarily as a result of the corrosion or wearing away of materials containing lead that are in the water distribution system and household plumbing.
- The most common sources of lead in drinking water are lead-based solder used to join copper pipe, faucets made of brass and chrome-plated brass, and in some cases, pipes made of lead that connect a home to the water main (service lines).
- In 1986, Congress banned the use of solder containing more than 0.2% lead and restricted the lead content of faucets, pipes, and other plumbing materials.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency established a regulation for lead in 1992. Testing has been required from household taps and other locations throughout the distribution system. An action level of 15 parts per billion (ppb) is now enforced. If the lead level remains consistently above the action level, the water supplier must take steps to reduce the amount using methods approved by USEPA.
- If the action level is exceeded, the water supplier must notify the public via a combination of newspapers, radio, TV, and other means.
- Each utility's annual [Consumer Confidence Report](#) contains information on lead monitoring. To find out how much lead is in your home tap water, you can have it tested by a state-certified laboratory.
- It may take several hours for lead to dissolve into your drinking water. This means that the first water drawn from the tap in the morning or after a period of non-use can contain higher levels of lead.
- Flushing your water tap is a simple method to avoid high lead levels, especially if the water in the faucet has gone unused for more than a few hours. To flush your tap, let the

cold water run from the tap until it feels noticeably colder (this could take 2 minutes or more) before using it for drinking or cooking. If you live in a high-rise building, flushing may not work. Contact your landlord for assistance.

- Some home treatment devices remove lead, but not all do. A good resource to determine if a device removes lead before you purchase it is [NSF International](#).
- Conserve water by catching water used for flushing and using it for watering plants or for washing dishes.
- Don't cook or drink water from the hot water tap. Hot water can dissolve lead more quickly than cold water.

Have your household wiring checked to see if grounding wires from the electrical system are attached to your pipes. Corrosion may be increased by this procedure. Check with a licensed electrician or your local electrical code to determine if your wiring can be grounded elsewhere.

Contact AWWA Public Affairs for more information

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