

Lead in Drinking Water

What is lead?

Lead is a metal that can be found in air, soil, water, and inside our homes. Lead is found in many materials, such as batteries, cosmetics, water pipes, and faucets. Lead may be found in paint used in homes built before 1978. You can't see, smell, or taste lead in water. Lead can be harmful to a person's health. It is best to avoid swallowing water that contains lead.

How does lead get into my drinking water?

Lead can get into your drinking water when pipes or faucets containing lead corrode. When pipes corrode, the metal begins to break down or dissolve.

How much lead can be in my drinking water?

When 10 percent of homes on the same public water supply have amounts of lead above 15 parts per billion (ppb) in the water, the public water supply will take action to lower the amount of lead in the water. This amount (15 ppb) is called an action level. Homeowners with their own well should take action to lower lead in their drinking water when the amount is above 15 ppb.

Although actions are not required if the amount of lead in the water is below the action level, no amount of lead should be in drinking water. Even small amounts of lead can be harmful to a person's health, especially in children under 6 years old. To learn how to reduce lead in drinking water, see the "How can I reduce lead in my drinking water" section.

What health problems can lead cause?

Lead in drinking water can enter your blood and build up in the body over time. Children under 6 years old are most at risk of harm to their health. If you are pregnant, lead can harm your fetus. Adults are less likely than children to be harmed by lead in water.

Pregnant Women and Fetuses

Lead can pass from a mother to her fetus. Lead in pregnant women can:

Reduce growth of the fetus including the brain, kidneys, and nervous system

Cause premature birth

Cause a miscarriage

Babies and Young Children

Higher amounts of lead can cause serious health problems for babies and children under 6 years old. Some of the health problems may never go away. Lead in a child's body can:

Slow down growth and development

Damage hearing and speech

Make it hard to pay attention and learn

Talk with your doctor if you have concerns about exposure to lead from drinking water or other sources. Your doctor may order a lead blood test to learn how much lead is in your blood.

Good nutrition is one way to protect your family from small amounts of lead. Include calcium, iron, and vitamin C in your family's diet. This may help keep lead from being absorbed in the body.

How do I know if lead is in my drinking water?

- Testing is the only way to know if lead is in your drinking water.
- If your drinking water comes from a public water supply, ask them for the annual water report to learn more about the water.
- Homes that have their own well for drinking water are not required by government agencies to test for lead. If you are concerned about lead, have your drinking water tested.
- Call your local health department or a certified laboratory to get a test kit. To learn more about testing kit availability, fees, and instructions, see the “For More Information” section.

How can I reduce lead in my drinking water?

- Use a water filter certified to reduce lead in the water. Look for the certification number NSF Standard 53 if you’re buying a filter.
- Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for filter installation and maintenance.
- If you do not have a filter and have not used your water for 6 hours or more, flush your pipes to reduce the amount of lead in your drinking water. You can flush your pipes by turning a faucet on all the way, taking a shower, running a load of laundry, or running dishwasher for 3-5 minutes.
- After flushing, run the water from any faucet until cold before drinking or cooking with the water.
- Do not boil your water to remove lead. Boiling water will increase the amount of lead in the water that’s left.
- Clean your faucets’ aerators or screens at least every six months.

When should I use filtered or unfiltered water?

If you have lead in your drinking water:

- Use cold filtered or flushed water for drinking, cooking, and for rinsing fruits and vegetables. Do not use hot water for these activities.
- Use cold filtered or bottled water for making powdered baby formula.
- Use cold filtered or flushed water for brushing teeth.
- You can use unfiltered or unflushed water for showering or bathing. Avoid swallowing the water.
- You can use unfiltered or unflushed water for washing your hands, dishes, clothes, floors, and countertops.

For More Information

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

www.michigan.gov/lead

800-648-6942

ask for the Drinking Water Investigation Unit

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

www.michigan.gov/deq

800-662-9278

List of Michigan Local Health Departments

<http://www.malph.org>

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

Laboratory Services

www.michigan.gov/deqlab



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