

# Lead in Drinking Water

## Tips to lower your exposure to lead in drinking water

### **What YOU can do:**

*Follow the simple tips in this fact sheet to lower the amount of lead that gets into your body when your drinking water contains lead.*

### **What is lead, and how has it been used in plumbing?**

Lead is a soft, gray toxic metal. It is found in air, soil, dust, food and water due to its widespread use.

Lead was used for many years in household plumbing materials and water service lines. Lead was used in the solder that connects copper pipes in household water plumbing. Lead plumbing can easily be scratched with a key because the metal is soft. This is one way lead plumbing can be identified.

Household plumbing materials sold AS OF January 4, 2014 are required to be lead-free (less than 0.25% lead). However, homes built before 1986 are more likely to have plumbing with:

- Lead pipes or solder joints
- Older brass faucets that contain lead
- Lead pipes connecting a house to the main water pipe in the street

Lead found in tap water usually comes from these plumbing materials.

### **How does lead get into my tap water?**

Lead enters tap water through corrosion or dissolving of plumbing materials. Most lead in household water comes from plumbing in your house, not from the local water supply.

Factors that increase the amount of lead that enters water from the plumbing are:

- Water sitting in leaded pipes for several hours
- Hot water (causes more lead to be released than cold water)
- Grounding of electrical wires to water pipes. This can increase the rate of corrosion.

### **Is my water being tested for lead?**

Municipal water systems test for lead as a regular part of water monitoring. These tests give a system-wide picture and do not reflect the actual amount of lead in drinking water at your house. The water authority provides information about water lead levels annually in the water bill.

### **Does drinking water with high lead levels cause health problems?**

Drinking water with elevated lead levels can cause health problems. Lead in water can enter your body and cause lead poisoning if levels are high. Exposure to lead from other sources, such as lead based paint, can also increase the levels of lead in your body.



Children 6 years old and younger, and pregnant women, are at higher risk of having lead-related health problems because:

- Children absorb more lead into their bodies than adults
- EPA estimates 20%, or more of children's lead exposure comes from drinking water.
- Lead contaminated drinking water may be used for preparing infants formula. EPA estimates 40-60% of infants lead exposure comes from formula made with tap water, when this is their primary source of nutrition.
- Pregnant women can pass lead from their bodies to their unborn baby.



*To help reduce the amount of lead absorbed and stored in your child's body, serve meals that are not high in fat, and are high in calcium and iron, including dairy product and green vegetables.*

## **What health problems may be caused by exposure to lead?**

Lead can cause a variety of health problems, depending on how much lead has built up in the body. Lead poisoning can cause learning, hearing and behavioral problems in children. Lead can harm a child's brain, kidneys and other organs. Adults who drink lead-contaminated water over many years may develop kidney problems or high blood pressure.

You can have you and your family's blood tested for lead. The level of lead in your blood may be used to see if you are likely to develop lead-related health problems. Children who are 6 years old or younger, and pregnant women who may have been exposed to lead, should have their blood tested for lead because they are at greatest risk of developing health effects from lead exposure.



*Bathing, showering, washing clothes and dishes, will not significantly increase exposure to lead, even if the water contains lead higher than EPA's action level. People's skin does not absorb lead from water and lead is not released into the air during showering and bathing.*

## **How can I learn more about lead in my tap water?**

Check out the CDC web page about lead in drinking water at:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tips/water.htm>

Check out the EPA web page about lead in drinking water at:  
<http://water.epa.gov/drink/contaminants/basicinformation/lead.cfm>