

Lead and Drinking Water: What You Need to Know

Lead poisoning is a serious, preventable health problem. It is especially dangerous to children. An estimated 310,000 American children have elevated blood lead levels. Most children do not show symptoms, and a blood test is the only way to detect the problem. The most common source of lead in the home is lead-based paint. However, lead may also be found in your drinking water.

Should I be worried about lead in my water?

- ◆ Yes. Too much lead can cause serious damage to the brain, kidneys, nervous system, and red blood cells.
- ◆ Young children and pregnant women are at greatest risk from lead poisoning. A child's growth can be slowed by lead poisoning. It can affect how well a child learns.



How does lead get into my water?



- ◆ Lead can get into your water from the water pipes.
- ◆ Lead can also come from the solder used to join or patch your pipes.
- ◆ Hot water will have higher lead levels than cold tap water.

Are some homes more likely to have problems?

- ◆ Homes built before 1930 usually have pipes made of lead.
- ◆ Homes built between 1983 and 1988 may have lead solder joining copper pipes.
- ◆ Lead levels decrease as the building ages.



How can I tell if my water has too much lead?

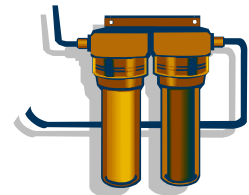
- ◆ Have your water tested for lead. You can't see, taste, or smell lead. Testing is the only sure way to find out.
- ◆ You should suspect lead in your water if:



- You have lead pipes.
- You see rust-colored water or stained clothes.
- Your home was built before 1930 or between 1983-88.

What can I do to reduce the lead in my water?

- ◆ Run the cold water until it becomes very cold (1 to 2 minutes) anytime that water has not been used for over six hours. This must be done for each faucet in the house that is used for drinking water.
- ◆ Think about replacing lead pipes, fittings, or faucets in your home.
- ◆ Use only cold water for drinking and cooking.
- ◆ Use only cold water when making baby formula.
- ◆ Pay attention to signs of corrosion such as rust-colored water and stained clothes or dishes. If you know you have lead pipes and you see these signs, have your water tested right away.
- ◆ Buy a water filter that will remove lead. Be sure the filter is certified to remove lead. Many water treatment devices may not reduce lead. Some water softeners and iron removal systems may increase the amount of corrosion. This increases the amount of lead being dissolved in your water.



Learn more about lead by:

- ☑ Contacting your county Extension office.
- ☑ Contacting your county health department.
- ☑ Visiting the Kentucky Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program Web site at www.putthelidonlead.org.
- ☑ Visiting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Web site at www.epa.gov/lead.
- ☑ Calling the Lead Information Center at (800) 424-LEAD (5323).

Revised by Kim Henken, Extension Associate for Environmental Issues, November 2005. Original by Denise Hoffman, Linda Heaton, Kim Henken, and Jenny Cocanougher, April 1999.

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