

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS) ABOUT LEAD IN WATER FROM PIPES AND PLUMBING

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WHAT IS LEAD?

Lead is a naturally occurring element found in small amounts in the earth's crust. While it has some beneficial uses, it can be toxic to humans and animals. Much of our exposure comes from human activities including past use of leaded gasoline and lead-based paint. Lead and lead compounds have been used in a wide variety of products found in and around our homes, including paint, ceramics, and cosmetics. Lead has been used in plumbing for centuries because of its pliability and resistance to leaks.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF LEAD?

Lead is a toxic metal that can cause immediate health effects at high doses and long-term health effects if it builds up in the body over many years. Lead can cause brain and kidney damage and increase the risk for high blood pressure and reduced fertility. Young children are particularly vulnerable because the physical and neurological effects of lead toxicity occur at lower levels than adults. Pregnant women are also at increased risk, as lead is released from the mother's bones along with calcium and can pass from the mother to the infant. This can increase the risk for miscarriage and result in serious developmental effects for the baby. Find more information about the health effects of lead exposure at www.cdc.gov.

HOW DOES LEAD ENTER DRINKING WATER?

Berkeley receives their water from the Hillcrest-Berkeley Water Commission (Commission). The Commission purchases water from the City of Chicago, receiving the water through a transmission system maintained by the Village of Melrose Park and then sells the water to the Villages of Hillside and Berkeley. Lead is not present in the City of Chicago's source water (Lake Michigan), nor is lead in the City of Chicago's treated drinking water. Lead can enter treated drinking water when plumbing materials that contain lead corrode, especially where the water has high acidity or low mineral content that corrodes pipes and fixtures. The most common sources of lead in drinking water are lead pipes, faucets, and fixtures in homes. Lead water service lines are lead pipes that connect the home to the Village's water main. These lead service lines are typically the most significant source of lead in water.

In 1986, the United States Congress amended the Safe Drinking Water Act, prohibiting the use of any lead pipe, flux, or solder in public water systems or indoor plumbing. Lead service lines are more likely to be found in older cities and homes built before 1986. Among homes without lead service lines, the most common exposure to lead is with brass or chrome-plated brass faucets and plumbing with lead solder.

DOES MY HOUSE HAVE LEAD PLUMBING?

In 1986, the United States Congress amended the Safe Drinking Water Act to prohibit use of any lead pipe, flux, or solder in public water systems or indoor plumbing. At the time, the “lead” distinction was applied to any solder or flux with more than 0.2% lead, and pipes containing more than 8%. In 2014, the maximum allowable lead content was reduced to not more than a weighted average of 0.25% of the wetted surface of pipes, pipe fittings, plumbing fittings, and fixtures, and 0.2% for solder and flux.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A LEAD SERVICE LINE?

You may be able to determine on your own if your service line is made of lead. Service lines typically enter the home in the basement or crawl space. If the pipe is lead, it will have a dull finish that shines brightly when scratched with a key or coin. Using a magnet can also help you identify a lead pipe, because even a strong magnet will not cling to lead.

The Village is committed to meeting the requirement of the Illinois Lead Service Replacement and Notification Act that became law on January 1, 2022. As a part of meeting those requirements, the Village is required to complete and submit a lead service material inventory. If you have determined that you have a lead service line, please contact the Village Public Works Department at 708-449-8840.

HOW MUCH LEAD IN WATER IS TOO MUCH?

Lead can be harmful even at very low levels and can accumulate in our bodies over time, so wherever possible, steps should be taken to reduce or eliminate your household’s exposure. While risks vary based on individual circumstances and the amount of water consumed, no concentration of lead is considered “safe.” Households with pregnant women, infants, or young children are most vulnerable to the harmful effects of lead at low levels. Find more information about the health effects of lead exposure at www.cdc.gov.

WHAT CAN I DO TO REDUCE LEAD EXPOSURE FROM MY DRINKING WATER?

The best way to remove risks of lead in water is to completely replace all sources of lead. But there are also steps you can take right away to reduce lead levels in your water.

1. *Run the Tap Before Use* – Lead levels are likely at their highest when water has been sitting in a lead pipe for several hours. Clear this water from your pipes by running the cold water for 3-5 minutes before using. This allows you to draw fresh water from the Village's water main. In efforts to conserve water, you can use this water on house plants or to flush toilets.
2. *Clean Aerators* – Aerators are small attachments at the tips of faucets which regulate the flow of water. They can accumulate small particles of lead in their screens. It's a good idea to remove your aerators at least monthly and clean them out.
3. *Use Cold Water for Cooking and Drinking* – Always cook and prepare baby formula with cold water, because hot water dissolves lead more quickly, resulting in higher levels in water.
4. *Filter the Water* – Many home water filters are effective at removing lead. If you purchase a filter, make sure it is certified to NSF/ANSI 53 and NSF/ANSI 42 for lead reduction and that you maintain it properly. Find out more on filter certification at www.nsf.org.

ARE THERE STEPS I CAN TAKE TO PROTECT MY DEVELOPING BABY, INFANT, OR YOUNG CHILDREN?

Households with pregnant women, infants, or young children should be especially aware of the potential for lead exposure through drinking water. If you suspect there may be lead in your home plumbing, consider having your water tested. The Village regularly tests for lead in the drinking water at a selected number of service locations. If lead is detected, consider purchasing a filter certified for lead removal or using an alternate source of water until the problem is corrected. Babies and young children are most vulnerable to the harmful effects of lead at low levels. U.S. EPA estimates infants who consume mostly mixed formula can receive 40 percent to 60 percent of their exposure to lead from drinking water.

WHAT DOES THE VILLAGE OF BERKELEY DO TO PROTECT MY HOUSEHOLD FROM LEAD?

The Village of Berkeley purchases its drinking from the Hillside-Berkeley Water Commission who ultimately purchases the water from the City of Chicago. To prevent lead from dissolving into water from lead service lines or home plumbing, the City of Chicago treats Lake Michigan water by adjusting the water's chemistry at the treatment plant. This process is known as corrosion control. Although corrosion control can reduce the risk of exposure to lead, the best way to assure your home is safe from lead exposure through water is to remove the potential sources of lead.

WHO OWNS THE LEAD SERVICE LINE?

In the Village of Berkeley, lead service lines are owned by the Village from the main up to the B-Box. The remainder of the water service is owned and maintained by the property owner. Replacing the entire lead service line is therefore a shared responsibility between the Village and each customer.



I'M IN A NEW HOUSE. AM I AT RISK?

In 1986, the United States Congress amended the Safe Drinking Water Act, prohibiting the use of any lead pipe, flux, or solder in public water systems or indoor plumbing. Lead service lines are more likely to be found in older cities and homes built before 1986. If you are concerned, contact the Village Public Works Department at 708-449-8840 to have an inspection.

DO ALL HOME FILTERS AND OTHER WATER TREATMENT DEVICES REMOVE LEAD?

No. If you purchase a water filter or home treatment device, make sure it is independently certified for lead removal and that you maintain it properly. Find out more on filter certification at www.nsf.org.

CAN MY PETS DRINK WATER WITH LEAD?

Lead can impact animals the same way it does humans. Because domestic animals consume a relatively high volume of water relative to their body weight, pet owners with lead in their home plumbing may want to take precautions.

IS IT SAFE TO SHOWER IN WATER THAT CONTAINS LEAD?

Because lead is not absorbed through the skin, bathing or showering in water containing lead is not considered a health risk.

IS WATER THE ONLY SOURCE OF LEAD IN HOMES AND BUSINESSES?

No. In fact, lead in drinking water generally represents only about 20% of total exposure, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The most common exposure to lead is swallowing and breathing in lead paint chips and dust. However, drinking water can account for more than half of lead exposure in children because of their lower body weight. Additionally, because no level of lead is considered safe, completely eliminating potential sources of lead is strongly advised.

DOES THE VILLAGE OF BERKELEY TEST FOR LEAD?

Yes. The Village of Berkeley is required by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to test for lead. The results are posted within the Village annual water quality report. You can also review the Village of Berkeley's Annual Water Quality Report posted at <https://www.berkeley.il.us/water> under Water Quality.

WHAT IS THE VILLAGE OF BERKELEY DOING TO ASSIST RESIDENTS WITH LEAD SERVICE LINE REPLACEMENTS?

The Village of Berkeley is required to notify customers whenever water mains, service lines, or water meters are repaired or replaced. Under USEPA's Revised Lead and Copper Rule, the Village has implemented a new outreach program and will notify consumers with known or suspected lead service lines and begin targeted outreach to encourage participation in the lead service line inventory and replacement program. If a property owner chooses to replace the private side of their lead service, the Village will replace the public portion of the lead service line as well.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

Information on lead in drinking water, testing methods, and steps you can take to minimize exposure is available by calling the EPA Safe Drinking Hotline at 1-800-426-4791 or by visiting www.epa.gov/safewater/lead. You can also review the Village of Berkeley's Annual Water Quality Report posted at <https://www.berkeley.il.us/water> under Water Quality. If you would like to discuss the issue with a local contact, call the Village Public Works Department at 708-449-8840.