VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

FAQs: Testing for Lead in School and Child Care Drinking Water

You can click on a question to go to the answer. All answers follow below. Go to the Lead Testing of Drinking Water in Schools and Child Care Facilities webpage for more information.

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Basics of the Law

1. Who is required to test?

All school districts, supervisory unions, independent schools, and licensed or registered child care providers in Vermont.

2. What are the requirements of the law?

The law requires schools and child care providers to test drinking water in their buildings for lead. If there is a test result at or above the action level of 4 ppb, schools and child care providers are to stop using that tap immediately, then develop and implement a remediation plan to lower the levels of lead to below 4 ppb.

Schools and child care providers are also required to notify parents, guardians and staff before testing begins, after results are received, and after remediation actions have been completed.

3. When are schools and child care providers required to test?

Child care providers began testing in June 2019. The child care provider testing schedule will be updated weekly after sample bottles are mailed out from the Lab. If you do not see a child care provider on the schedule, the sample bottles have not been sent to that child care provider yet.

Schools will begin testing in September 2019. The school testing schedule will be updated as pickup dates are confirmed. If you do not see a school listed on the schedule, that means it has not been scheduled yet.

4. What is the action level, and what does it mean?

The action level set by the legislature is 4 ppb. If the level of lead in drinking water is at or above 4 ppb, then schools and child care providers are required to fix the problem to lower lead levels below 4 ppb.

Any tap with a result at or above 4 ppb cannot be used for drinking and cooking—also not used for food prep, making bottles and brushing teeth in child care settings—until a fix has been implemented and follow-up testing shows the lead levels at the tap are below 4 ppb. Alternatively, the fixture can be permanently removed.

Test Results and Remediation

1. **How long will it take to get results?**
   Schools and child care providers will receive results from the Lab 2 to 6 weeks after they return samples to the Lab. One week after schools and child care providers receive the results, they will be posted on the Results Website.

2. **How are the results being communicated and where will the results be made available?**
   Results will be sent directly to the schools and child care providers. One week later, the results will be posted on the Results Website. Please note that licensed child care programs (preschool or afterschool) that operate in a school will be listed under the school's name.

   Schools and child care providers are responsible for notifying parents, guardians and staff within 10 business days of receiving the results.

3. **What does a "first draw" sample mean? What does a "flush" sample mean?**
   First draw sample – collects the first water that comes out of the tap after a period of inactivity (between 8 and 18 hours). The first draw sample tests the water that is in the fixture.

   Flush sample – collects water after the tap has been running for 30 seconds. The flush sample tests the water that is in the pipes.

4. **What happens if results show levels at or above 4 ppb in the water?**
   If lead levels are found to be at or above 4 ppb, schools and child care providers must immediately stop using the tap for drinking and cooking—also for food prep, making bottles and brushing teeth in child care settings—and provide an alternative source.

   After the problem has been addressed, schools and child care providers need to test the tap again. If levels are below 4 ppb, then the tap can be used again.

5. **What happens if lead is found in the water, but the levels are below 4 ppb?**
   No remediation action is required. Schools and child care providers will still notify parents, guardians and staff of the results within 10 business days of receiving the results, and they will be posted on the Results Website.

6. **Who can I talk to about the results or remediation actions for my child's school/child care program?**
   It depends on the question. Start by contacting your child's school or child care. If they can't answer your question, then call 2-1-1.

General Questions About Lead and Lead Poisoning

1. **What is lead?**
   Lead is a highly toxic metal that has been commonly used in many household, industrial and automobile products—such as paint, solder, batteries, brass, car radiators, bullets, pottery, etc. Exposure to lead is a public health concern in Vermont.

2. **How does lead make you sick?**
   Lead is a toxic metal that is harmful to human health. Lead can harm anyone, but children under the age of six are at special risk. Children are most susceptible to the effects of lead because their bodies are still developing, and they absorb lead more easily than adults do. Lead can affect children's development in many ways, but it can cause particular harm to the central nervous system (brain).

   There is no safe level of lead in the body. Even low blood lead levels in a child's body can slow growth, make it hard to learn, and cause behavior problems. Most children who have lead poisoning or high levels of lead exposure do not look or act sick.

3. **What are common sources for lead exposure?**
   Sources include dust from deteriorated lead-based paint, toys, keys, jewelry, pottery, dishes, contaminated soil, old plumbing pipes and fixtures in homes, imported candy and foods, and antique, vintage and salvaged goods.

   While a major source of lead poisoning in Vermont children is paint, lead in plumbing pipes and fixtures can add to a child's overall lead exposure.

   Learn more about lead hazards and lead poisoning.

4. **How does lead get into drinking water?**
   Lead can get into drinking water as the water moves through plumbing components that contain lead, such as brass fixtures or solder with a high lead content. There have been several advances to remove lead from plumbing components over the years but

depending on the age of the plumbing materials, there may be varying levels of lead content. In addition, water that sits in lead plumbing and fixtures for longer periods of time will contain higher levels of lead.

Learn more about lead in a home's drinking water.

5. Do water filters remove lead?

Not all water filters will remove lead. The filter must meet NSF/ANSI Standard 53 or 58. Filters must be replaced according to manufacturer instructions to ensure the filter continues to remove lead. Recommendations are listed in the product's owner manual or on the product's packaging.

6. My child's school or child care had levels at or above 4 ppb. Should my child get checked their doctor?

Probably not. Any time a child's test shows an elevated blood lead level (at or above 5 micrograms per deciliter (µg/dL), the Health Department tries to identify the source of the exposure. By testing all schools and child care facilities and requiring remediation, we will be certain that any exposure from drinking water at a child care facility has been identified and reduced.

When deciding whether to test a child for lead in response to a school or child care provider's water test results, it is important to understand that the possible exposure to lead from drinking the water at school or child care may only be a part of the picture.

We can't know how much water an individual child drank at school or child care, so the amount of exposure is unknown. There may also be additional considerations that would prompt a blood lead test, including:

- exposure to lead in a house or apartment building built before 1978 (dust from lead paint is a leading source of exposure) or an adult who has occupational exposure to lead
- previously identified behavioral or academic problems
- parental concern and desire to know if the child has been exposed

All children should be screened for lead at age 1 and again at age 2 by their health care providers. Talk to your child's health care provider if you have questions about your child's lead exposure.

Learn more about lead hazards and lead poisoning.

7. Should I test my home's water for lead?

Since you can't see, taste or smell lead in water, testing is the only sure way to know whether there are harmful levels of lead in your drinking water.

If you're on a private source of water (for example, well or spring), a lead test is included in the standard homeowner's water test kits from the Health Department Lab.

Learn more about testing your well water for lead and other contaminants.

If you're on a public water supply (e.g. town water), you can check with your town or water supplier for the Consumer Confidence Report (or find it online), which will tell you the level of lead found in your water system. However, lead can get into your drinking water from contact with lead in plumbing and fixtures in your home, so the Health Department recommends that people on public water—especially if they live in an older home (pre-1986)—test their kitchen tap or any other tap used for consumption (for example, drinking, cooking, food prep, making bottles and brushing teeth) for lead.

To test your own home for lead in drinking water, call the Health Department Laboratory to order a $12 first draw lead test kit at 802-338-4736 or 800-660-9997.

Learn more about lead in a home's drinking water.

8. Should I stop drinking my home's water if high levels of lead are found?

If the level of lead is above 0.001 mg/L (1 ppb), the Health Department recommends taking action to lower lead levels in your water. Consider installing a treatment system to remove lead, replacing pipes or plumbing fixtures and fittings, drinking and preparing food with bottled water, or getting water from a known safe source.

See information on treatment systems.

Schools and child care providers are required to take the tap out of service, which means to stop using it, if levels are found at or above 4 ppb until a fix is made and follow-up testing shows that water from that tap is below 4 ppb.

9. If there are high levels of lead in my drinking water at home, is it safe for pets to drink?

In general, if the water is not recommended for humans to drink, then it's best not to give it to pets.

Lead is toxic to small animals (dogs and cats), but the exposure usually comes from home renovations that create lead paint dust that pets lick off of surfaces, not from water.