



# *FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS*

## Lead in Drinking Water

### ***WHAT IS LEAD?***

Lead is a toxic metal that was used for many years in products found in and around homes. Although lead is found in nature, most exposure comes from human activities or use. Lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust are the primary sources of exposure for children. Lead is sometimes used in plumbing materials or in water-service lines used to bring water from the main line to homes, schools, or other buildings.

### ***WHAT ARE THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF LEAD?***

Lead is a significant health concern, particularly for children, whose developing bodies are more susceptible to its harmful effects. Adverse health impacts from lead include damage to the brain and kidneys, reduced IQ and attention span, learning disabilities, poor classroom performance, hyperactivity, behavioral problems, and impaired growth. The primary source of lead exposure for most children is lead-based paint in older homes. Lead in drinking water can add to that exposure.

### ***WHAT ARE SOME COMMON SOURCES OF LEAD?***

Lead is typically present in low levels in a variety of different sources, such as food, drinking water, soil, dust, and air. Individuals are exposed to lead from eating food, drinking water, accidentally swallowing soil and dust, and from breathing air that contains lead. Other less common sources of lead include some handmade pottery and imported cookware, home remedies, toys, candy, jewelry, and canned food. Since everyone is exposed to small amounts of lead in their daily life, it is not uncommon for a low level of lead to be present in someone's body.

### ***HOW DOES LEAD GET INTO DRINKING WATER?***

In Utah, most drinking water sources from reservoirs and groundwater are lead-free. When lead is present in water, it is typically due to water flowing through lead pipes or plumbing in buildings. Service lines — the pipes that connect homes, schools, or other buildings to the water main — can also have lead in them. There may also be lead pipes, pipes connected with lead solder, or brass faucets or fittings containing lead inside homes or schools. Lead levels are highest when the water has been sitting in lead pipes for several hours. Additionally, using hot water can draw lead out of pipes, solder, or fixtures and release it into the water.

### ***WHY IS THERE AN ACTION LEVEL RATHER THAN A HEALTH-BASED LIMIT FOR LEAD?***

EPA is required by law to determine the level of contaminants in drinking water at which no adverse health effects are likely to occur. These health-based *goals* are called maximum contaminant level goals (MCLGs). EPA has set the MCLG for lead in drinking water at zero because the best available science has not been able to determine a safe level for lead in drinking water. However, the agency has set an action level of 15 micrograms per liter (µg/L) that triggers additional actions by public water systems if over 10 percent of the faucets sampled exceed this level. In 2015, EPA began work on developing a health-based household standard for lead in drinking water; these

studies are still underway. Since the 15 µg/L action level is the only standard available under current law, states sampling for lead in their schools measure their test results against this standard.

### ***DO I NEED TO WORRY ABOUT LEAD IS IN MY DRINKING WATER?***

Your public water system employs a number of measures to ensure your water is safe to drink. [The Safe Drinking Water Act's \(SDWA's\) Lead and Copper Rule](#) requires public water systems to control the corrosivity of their water. (You may remember that highly corrosive water was responsible for the high levels of lead in Flint, Michigan's drinking water). Systems must collect samples at customer taps in homes that are more likely to have plumbing materials containing lead. If the lead concentrations exceed the 15 µ/L action level in more than 10 percent of the taps sampled, the water system must take additional actions to control corrosion. SDWA also requires public water systems to prepare and distribute an annual water quality report called the [Consumer Confidence Report \(CCR\)](#) to its customers. The CCR contains information about any contaminants found in the water, including lead.

Most lead problems in homes, however, do not originate with the finished drinking water provided by your water supplier, but from lead pipes, solder, and fixtures within the house.

If you have concerns about lead levels in the drinking water at your home, you can have your water tested for lead. Testing costs between \$20 and \$100. You may want to test if your home has lead pipes or if you see signs of corrosion. Your water supplier may have useful information, including whether the service connector used in your home or area is made of lead. Testing is especially important in apartment buildings where flushing might not work. If your water comes from a household well, check with your health department or local water systems that use ground water for information on contaminants of concern in your area.

### ***HOW ARE LEAD SAMPLES TAKEN?***

Lead samples are taken at the highest risk sample sites (based on year of construction) and during the warmest months of the year when the highest lead levels are expected to occur. Samples are collected from a kitchen or bathroom tap after the water has stood in the pipes for at least six hours.

### ***HOW CAN I REDUCE LEAD IN The DRINKING WATER AT MY HOME?***

- Flush your pipes before drinking. The more time water has been sitting in your home's pipes, the more lead it may contain. The most important time to flush is after long periods of non-use, such as first thing in the morning, after work, or upon returning from vacation.
- Use only water from the cold-water tap for drinking, cooking, and especially for making baby formula. Hot water is likely to contain higher levels of lead.
- Household water-use activities — showering, washing clothes, flushing the toilet, or running the dishwasher— are effective methods for flushing pipes and allowing water from the distribution system to enter household pipes.
- If your system has elevated levels of lead, do not boil water to remove lead. Boiling water will not reduce lead in your drinking water.
- If you live in an area served by older water systems, check with your water supplier to see if they have lead pipes or service lines and if they have been replaced partially or in whole. In many lead service-line replacements, replacement will only have been to the meter, and there may be lead service-lines after the meter and lead pipes within the building. To determine if your property has a lead service line or lead pipes, hire a licensed plumber to inspect the service line and replace all lead pipes.
- When purchasing replacement plumbing products, make sure the products have been tested and certified to “lead-free” standards.