



Get the Lead Out

*Ensuring Safe Drinking Water
for Our Children at School*

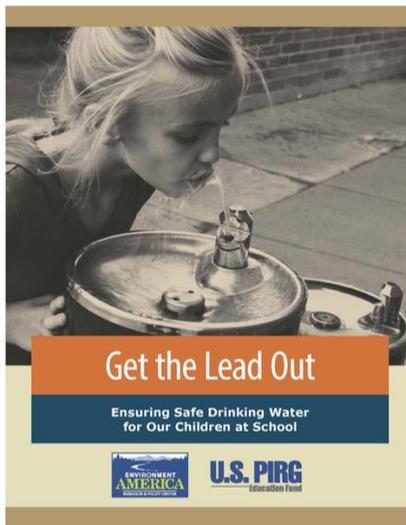


“BACK TO SCHOOL” TOOLKIT

Our children need safe drinking water – especially at school where they go to learn and play each day. Unfortunately, lead is contaminating drinking water at schools and pre-schools across the country.

The problem stems from pipes, plumbing, faucets and fixtures that contain lead. The common-sense solution is to “get the lead out” of schools’ water delivery systems.

This “Back to School” toolkit is designed to help parents, teachers and school officials get the facts on lead in drinking water and make the case for strong local action to ensure safe drinking water at school:



- Learn the facts about lead in schools’ drinking water with our ***Factsheet***.
- Raise awareness in your community by sharing a short ***Video*** on social media, and submitting a ***Letter to the Editor*** to your local paper.
- Show support for taking action by circulating a ***Petition***.
- Find answers to more detailed questions with our ***Links to Additional Resources***.

© 2017 Environment Washington Research & Policy Center

[Environment Washington Research & Policy Center](#) is dedicated to protecting our air, water and open spaces. We investigate problems, craft solutions, educate the public and decision-makers, and help the public make their voices heard in decisions over the quality of our environment and our lives. You can find more information on our state and national efforts to *Get the Lead Out* [here](#).

Factsheet on Lead in Schools' Drinking Water

The Problem

In the wake of the tragedy in Flint, Michigan, we now know the toxic threat of lead in drinking water extends to thousands of communities across the country. In fact, lead is even contaminating drinking water in ***schools and pre-schools*** - flowing from fountains and faucets where our kids drink water every day.

Lead is highly toxic, especially for children.

A potent neurotoxin, lead affects how our children learn, grow, and behave. According to EPA, "In children, low levels of [lead] exposure have been linked to damage to the central and peripheral nervous systems, learning disabilities, shorter stature, impaired hearing, and impaired formation and function of blood cells."¹

There is no safe level of lead.

"[EPA has set the maximum contaminant level goal for lead in drinking water at zero](#) because lead is a toxic metal that can be harmful to human health even at low exposure levels." In fact, medical researchers estimate that ***more than 24 million children in America will lose IQ points*** due to low levels of lead.²

Lead is contaminating drinking water at schools.



Photo: Julie Falk, Creative Commons, some rights reserved

As more schools test their water for lead, they are finding widespread contamination. 34 water systems in Washington State alone have unacceptable levels of lead. Maple Valley Elementary, Griffin School in Olympia, Shelton Valley Christian School, Skamania Elementary, and Washington State Patrol Academy are among those 34 contaminated water systems.³ Schools' water is laced with lead in all kinds of communities – urban neighborhoods, rural towns, and affluent suburbs as well.

In all likelihood, the confirmed cases of lead in schools' water are just the tip of the iceberg. Any school built **before 2014** is likely to have significant lead in its pipes, plumbing, and/or

fixtures. *And where there is lead, there is risk of contamination.*

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Basic Information about Lead in Drinking Water," *EPA.gov*, updated December 2016, accessible at <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/basic-information-about-lead-drinking-water>.

² American Academy of Pediatrics, *Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity*, July 2016, page 4, available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2016/06/16/peds.2016-1493.full.pdf>.

³ KUOW, "[Lead Found in 34 Washington Drinking Water Systems](#)," 3/18/2016.

Solutions

- **Install Filters Now:** Installing filters certified to remove lead is an easy, low-cost step schools can take to begin protecting children immediately. Filters should be installed and maintained on all faucets and fountains used for cooking or drinking in schools.

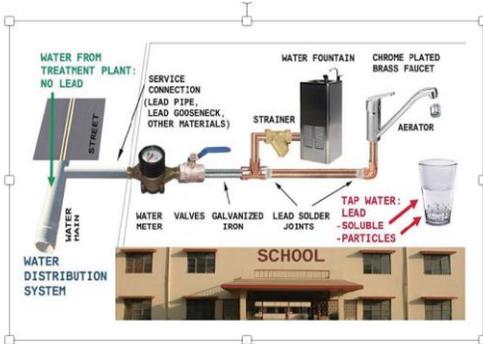


Image: W.K. Kellogg Foundation, *Managing Lead in Drinking Water at Schools and Early Childhood Education Facilities* (February 2016), reproduced from Edwards 2009.

- **Get the Lead Out:** replacing pipes, plumbing, fountains and/or fixtures that contain lead is the most effective, permanent solution to prevent contamination of the water our children drink at school (or elsewhere).
 - **Remove Lead Service Lines:** if the pipe connecting your school (or home or child care center) to the water main in the street is made of lead, that *lead service line* is likely to be the largest single source of water contamination. Have it replaced as soon as possible.
- **Doctor's Orders - 1 part per billion (ppb):** The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommends that schools keep lead concentrations in water no greater than 1 ppb. Taps used for drinking or cooking that test above 1 ppb of lead should be shut off until remediated.
 - **Ace the Test:** Regularly test all outlets used for drinking or cooking, using proper sampling methods that are more likely to detect lead contamination.
 - **Communicate:** Plans and actual steps taken to prevent lead contamination, along with all test results, should be made easily accessible (including online) to parents, teachers, and the public. Outlets should clearly indicate when filters are due to be replaced.

Understanding test results and limitations

In some communities, schools are already testing water for lead. In others, local officials might want to see testing results before taking action. Either way, here is what you should know:

- **Lead corrosion is highly variable.** As a result, tests sometimes fail to detect lead – or the full extent of lead - in water, especially when sampling is done improperly.
- **Share *all* your work with the class.** Sometimes officials or the media only report lead levels in water that exceed 15 (or 20) parts per billion (ppb). But there is no safe level of lead for children. Ask to see all test results detecting any level of lead in the water.
- **Cheating on the test?** Contamination tends to be higher the longer water sits in contact with lead-bearing pipes or fixtures. So samples taken after flushing of the system, or even regular water use, are unlikely to detect the full extent of lead contamination at school.
- **Act now to protect children's health.** We already know that wherever there is lead in a water delivery system, there is a risk of contamination. Schools need not wait for test results before taking action to protect our children's health.

Contact: Bruce Speight, bruce@environmentwashington.org, (206) 568-2850

Social Media Tools

To help spread awareness, here is a [short video](#) about lead in schools' drinking water that you can share and like on Facebook and other social media:



And if you are on **Twitter**, here are some sample tweets to help raise visibility online:

As @[yourtown] goes #backtoschool, we know kids run better unleaded. Help #GettheLeadOut of water at our schools.

Contaminated water @[yourtown] schools? Time for @[LOCAL DECISIONMAKER] to #GettheLeadOut. [INSERT LINK TO YOUR LOCAL PETITION]

We know kids run better unleaded. So as our children head #backtoschool, get the facts on safe drinking water from @Env_Washington
<https://tinyurl.com/GetLeadOutReport>

As our kids head #backtoschool, here's a quick homework assignment for @[yourtown] parents: watch this @Env_Washington video about lead in schools' drinking water. <https://tinyurl.com/GTLOvideo>

Sample Letters to the Editor

(TIPS: if possible, write your letter in response to a recent article. Adhere to word limits (if any), provide contact information, and call the paper to make the case for your letter being printed.)

#1. If your school/district has already tested for lead:

To the Editor:

Thank you for your recent piece on the “back to school” season ([INSERT TITLE AND DATE OF RELEVANT NEWS STORY]). Here’s one challenge that parents and children should never have to worry about when headed back to school: lead in drinking water.

Lead is a potent neurotoxin that impairs how children learn, grow, and behave. Yet from tests done last year, we now know that there is lead in our schools’ drinking water here in [COMMUNITY]. Moreover, because tests often fail to detect lead in water, the threat to our children’s health is likely more pervasive than the results show.

To protect our children’s health, here is a “back to school” homework assignment for [COMMUNITY]: let’s work together to get the lead out. We can start by immediately installing filters certified to remove lead on faucets and fountains in our schools. We’ll also need to replace the lead pipes, solder, and fixtures that cause the contamination in the first place. Meanwhile, let’s shut off taps where lead in water exceeds one part per billion, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Our children deserve safe drinking water at school. Let’s get to work.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[OTHER REQUIRED INFO]

#2. If your school/district has not tested for lead:

To the Editor:

Thank you for your recent piece on the “back to school” season ([INSERT TITLE AND DATE OF RELEVANT NEWS STORY]). Here’s one challenge that parents and children should never have to worry about when headed back to school: lead in drinking water.

Lead is a potent neurotoxin that impairs how children learn, grow, and behave. In the wake of the tragedy in Flint, Michigan, more schools across the country are testing their water. And all too often, they are finding lead flowing from faucets and fountains where children drink.

Like most communities, [COMMUNITY’s] schools have plumbing and fixtures made with lead. So even without any testing, there is every reason to believe that lead is contaminating water at our schools as well.

So here is a “back to school” homework assignment for [COMMUNITY]: let’s work together to get the lead out. We can start by immediately installing filters certified to remove lead on faucets and fountains in our schools. We’ll also need to replace the lead pipes, solder, and fixtures that cause the contamination in the first place. Meanwhile, let’s shut off taps where lead in water exceeds one part per billion, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Our children deserve safe drinking water at school. Let’s get to work.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[OTHER REQUIRED INFO]

GET THE LEAD OUT: Links to Additional Resources:

Overview: Environment Washington, [Get the Lead Out](#) (2017)

Likelihood of lead contamination at your school:

- [Until 2014](#), federal standards allowed plumbing, faucets, and fixtures to have a weighted average of 8 percent of surface area in contact with water made of lead. So unless your school has brand new plumbing and fixtures, it is highly likely that its water is in contact with significant amounts of lead before it is used for drinking or cooking. (Standards allowed *even higher* levels of lead in plumbing and pipes before 1986.)
- As more schools test, they are finding lead in their water. See Figure 3 in this [Get the Lead Out](#) Report.

Lead in water is harmful, even at low levels:

- American Academy of Pediatrics, [Policy Statement on Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity](#) (June 2016) (urging officials to ensure that lead concentrations in schools' drinking water is no greater than 1 part per billion)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), [Basic Information About Lead in Drinking Water](#), including [Is There a Safe Level of Lead in Drinking Water?](#) ("EPA has set the maximum contaminant level goal for lead in drinking water at zero because lead is a toxic metal that can be harmful to human health even at low exposure levels.")
- [EPA Never Said 15 ppb is Safe](#) (quoting EPA official who helped set the 15 ppb standard).

Proper testing and limitations:

- Virginia Tech [Instructions to Flint Residents for Proper Water Sampling](#) (no water use for at least 6 hours beforehand, three separate samples from each tap at timed intervals)
- [EPA-Certified Labs to Send Water Samples](#)
- [Avoid Flushing Before Taking Samples](#) (Without flushing, New York City schools found *nine times* as many outlets with high levels of lead so far.)
- [Even a Few Tests Do Not Assure Water is Safe](#) (quoting Dr. Marc Edwards, Virginia Tech)
- Sometimes test results are expressed in terms of ug/dL, which stands for micrograms per deciliter; [1 ug/dL equals 10 ppb](#) (parts per billion).

Finding Filters Certified to Remove Lead:

- National Sanitation Foundation - <http://www.nsf.org/>
- Water Quality Association - <https://www.wqa.org/>
- CSA - <http://www.csagroup.org/industries/plumbing/drinking-water-requirements/>