

# 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](http://www.cdc.gov).

## **HOW DOES LEAD ENTER DRINKING WATER?**

West Palm Beach receives their water from Lake Mangonia and Clear Lake, which is fed by the Grassy Waters Preserve. The City's Water Plant treats and disinfects the lake water and then sends it through water main pipes to service lines and plumbing pipes at each property. 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 a home to a City water main. Those lines are typically the most significant source in cases where lead is found 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 containing greater than 0.25% lead, and restricted the lead content of faucets, pipes, and other plumbing materials to 8.0%. 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.

You may be able to determine on your own if your plumbing pipe is made of lead. 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.

### **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. 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 City is committed to meeting the requirement of the United States Environmental Protection Agency Lead and Copper Rule Revisions that became law on December 16, 2021. As a part of meeting those requirements, the City is required to complete and submit a service line material inventory. The inventory can be viewed on the City’s website.

### **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](http://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 Faucet 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 City'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](http://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 by a private laboratory. 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 CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH DO TO PROTECT MY HOUSEHOLD FROM LEAD?**

The City follows Florida Department of Environmental Protection guidelines for the testing and monitoring of lead in drinking water. In addition, the City purchases and installs lead-free water service materials and fittings, uses pipe corrosion inhibitors, and maintains a backflow and cross-connection control program.

### WHO OWNS THE LEAD SERVICE LINE?

In the City of West Palm Beach, service lines are typically owned by the City from the main up to the meter. The remainder of the water service, from the meter into the building, is owned and maintained by the property owner. Replacing an entire lead service line is therefore a shared responsibility between the City 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.

### 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](http://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 CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH TEST FOR LEAD?**

Yes. The City of West Palm Beach is required by the Safe Drinking Water Act to test for lead. The results are posted in the City's annual water quality report. You can also review the City's Annual Water Quality Report posted at <https://www.wpb.org/Departments/Public-Utilities/Water-Quality-Reports>.

### **WHAT IS THE CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH DOING TO ASSIST RESIDENTS WITH LEAD SERVICE LINE REPLACEMENTS?**

Under USEPA's Revised Lead and Copper Rule, the City has implemented a new outreach program and will notify consumers with known or suspected lead service lines. The City will also plan and coordinate the replacement of any City-owned portion of a lead service line it maintains upon identification, as well as notifying customers of any lead service line portions that are owned and maintained by the customer.

### **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 Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791 or by visiting [www.epa.gov/safewater/lead](http://www.epa.gov/safewater/lead). You can also review the City of West Palm Beach's Annual Water Quality Report posted at <https://www.wpb.org/Departments/Public-Utilities/Water-Quality-Reports> or view the City's service line inventory at <https://www.wpb.org/Departments/Public-Utilities/Water-Service-Line>.