

ERIE COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
503 KENSINGTON AVE.  
BUFFALO, NY 14214  
(716) 961-6800  
WWW.ERIE.GOV/HEALTH



# Lead In Water

LEAD POISONING PREVENTION AND YOU

## Lead in drinking water

Lead is a heavy metal that can sometimes be found as a contaminant in drinking water. Public water suppliers normally test the water to ensure it is free of lead and other contaminants, but older supply lines, including the pipes and fittings present in your home, may be a source of contamination. If you live in an older home, or a house or apartment built with lead pipes or lead soldered copper piping, small amounts of lead can find its way into tap water and present a hazard, especially to young children.

The most common cause of lead in household water is corrosion;

a type of chemical reaction that occurs between the water and the materials in pipes and plumbing fittings. Corrosive water can leach lead and other metals out of pipes, plumbing connectors, faucets, fixtures, and even solder, causing tap water to become contaminated.

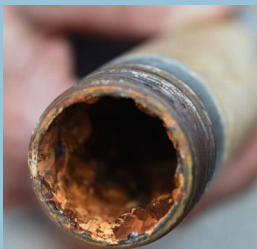
Many different factors, such as acidity, dissolved minerals, and water treatment affect the corrosiveness of supplied water. Suppliers use special water treatment methods to remove contaminants and ensure pipes and fixtures are not corroded in the majority of homes.

Still, if you live in an older building, or in an area where there are lead service connections or if you are uncertain of the level of water treatment, it is best to take some simple precautions.



**Some homes have been built with lead pipes or fixtures containing lead. The only way to tell how much lead may be in your household water is to have**

### Did you know...



### CORROSION

Corrosion in water pipes, whether due to damage or poorly treated water, can release lead from plumbing fixtures.

## Why is lead a health concern

Lead is harmful to human health; no amount of lead in the body is "safe". Babies and very young children exposed to lead can sustain irreversible damage to their nervous system.

Even low levels of lead can cause developmental delays, brain damage, lower I.Q., hearing loss and behavioral problems.



Lead levels in your home's tap water are more likely to be high when:

- ◆ Your home's plumbing or water supply system is made with lead pipes, or has faucets or fittings containing lead, or
- ◆ Your home has copper pipes that are connected with lead-containing solder, or
- ◆ Your water often sits in the pipes for several hours between uses.

Sources: New York State Dept. of Health, US Environmental Protection Agency, Center for Disease Control

# What you can do to protect your family

## Flush water before using

- ◆ Lead concentrations in water are highest when the water has been sitting in the pipes for a long period of time. Open faucet and allow to run until it's cold as it will get, especially if it hasn't been used for several hours.
- ◆ Each fixture must be flushed separately. Taking a shower will not flush the standing water out of the pipes in the kitchen.
- ◆ Save a pitcher of flushed water in the refrigerator for later use in the day if you do not want to waste water. Be sure to use lead free containers.

## Use only cold water for drinking, cooking, and washing fruits and vegetables

- ◆ Hot water is more likely to leach lead and other contaminants out of the pipes and fixtures. Be extra careful to use only fresh, flushed cold water for all water for preparation of foods, beverages such as coffee or tea, and especially baby formulas.

## Understand your plumbing

- ◆ Over time, mineral deposits build up in pipes, creating an effective barrier to the leaching

of lead into the water. The older the pipes and the harder the water, the more minerals may be present. After flushing, the water should be perfectly safe to use.

- ◆ Newer plumbing systems are supposed to be built with lead-free pipes and fixtures, but you can never be certain that no lead is present. Very new pipes or homes with naturally soft water may not have time to build up a protective layer of minerals, making flushing even more important.



**Running the water before using it helps flush lead-contaminated standing water out of the pipes, minimizing exposure. Use only cold water for cooking or drinking.**

## Should I have my water tested?



If you think your home's water supply might contain dangerous amounts of lead, you can consider having it tested. Water testing may be appropriate if your home's plumbing shows signs of corrosion or damage. If you are uncertain about the quality of your water or when having your water tested be sure to:

- ◆ Always use an accredited laboratory to ensure the accuracy and reliability of analyses.
- ◆ Follow the laboratory's instructions *exactly* when drawing and submitting samples.
- ◆ For a list of accredited laboratories visit NYS Dept. of

Health Wadsworth Center at <https://www.wadsworth.org/regulatory/elap/certified-labs>.

- ◆ The Erie County Public Health Laboratory is a NYS accredited laboratory and offers water testing for a fee. Contact them at 898-6100 for more information.

## Other tips

- ◆ Don't use the garden hose for drinking water.
- ◆ Consider using a cartridge-type filter on your drinking water tap. Be sure to check that the device you use is

certified to remove lead, and ensure the filter is replaced regularly.

- ◆ Avoid using imported, painted or glazed crockery for storing water for drinking or cooking.

Some decorative items are suitable for flowers or display but may contain lead.

- ◆ Check with your local water supplier for more information about their lead testing

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Erie County Department of Health  
(716) 961-6800  
[www.erie.gov/health/lead](http://www.erie.gov/health/lead)

Erie County Public Health Laboratory  
(716) 898-6100  
[www.erie.gov/health](http://www.erie.gov/health)

NYS Department of Health  
1-800-458-1158  
[www.health.ny.gov/environmental/lead](http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/lead)

Environmental Protection Agency  
1-800-424-LEAD  
[www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead)