



Arizona Public School Drinking Water Lead Screening Program Top Ten List: Things to Know If Elevated Lead Levels Are Detected in Your School Water

1. This project was not started because of any indication of a potential problem.

The Arizona public school drinking water lead screening project was started to proactively detect lead in water in schools so that schools are aware of potential problems and can take action to address these problems. The Arizona Department of Health Services has never identified a drinking water source as the major contributor to elevated blood lead levels.

2. A lead level of more than 15 parts per billion (ppb) in water is a signal for a school to take action to reduce lead in water.

The 15 ppb level is considered an “action level.” When levels of more than 15 ppb are found, this is a signal for a school to take steps to reduce lead in water. This level is not a measure of the lead present in the water during continued use throughout the school day. This level was measured when water was sitting in the pipes for a period of several hours without being used in order to get an idea of what the highest level of lead in the water is likely to be.

3. Lead detected in water sources at your child’s school is not likely to be primary cause of lead poisoning.

Most school-age children don’t drink a lot of water from school drinking fountains. Children usually drink more water at home or bring their own water bottles to school. That means that any water found to be above lead screening values during this project would be only a small fraction of potential lead sources children may be exposed to and not likely to be a major contributor to lead poisoning.

4. The lead found in water at school is not likely to have come from the water itself.

Typically, lead leaches out of plumbing and building fixtures, including lead solder used on pipes. If water is corrosive, or has low mineral content, it can cause lead from these fixtures to leach into the water. This is a greater risk for plumbing systems built before 1986. Arizona’s water is considered to be hard water. The minerals in hard water eventually coat the inside of the pipes and prevent lead from dissolving into the water. More lead is leached out of pipes and solder when the water stays in pipes for a long time, and when the water is acidic, soft, and hot.

5. It is safe for your child to continue using water at school for handwashing and showering.

In most cases, lead only causes a health concern if it is eaten, drank, or breathed in in high levels. Flushing a toilet, washing hands, cleaning a wound, or showering with water that has lead levels above 15 ppb will not increase your child’s exposure to lead. If lead was found in a water source at your school that your child does not drink from or is not used to prepare your child’s food, it is unlikely that your child has been exposed to lead from water at school.



6. Drinking water is NOT a common source of lead in Arizona.

Drinking water contributes only a small fraction of potential lead exposure in Arizona. Here, the most common sources of lead include lead-based paint in houses built before 1978, and some household products including antique or imported toys, antique furniture, imported spices and candies, “home remedies,” and lead-glazed pottery used for cooking.

7. Young children are most at risk of lead poisoning and its effects.

Children six years and younger are most at risk for lead poisoning because they are experiencing rapid growth and brain development. In addition, younger children are more likely to put things in their mouths, including items contaminated with lead, which gives them more opportunity for exposure to lead. Because of this, screening is recommended for young children between 12 and 24 months who live in high-risk zip codes. These zip codes can be found at www.azhealth.gov/lead.

8. Blood lead levels can decrease over time if an individual is no longer exposed to lead.

While eating, drinking or breathing high levels of lead over time can lead to high levels of lead in the blood, especially in very young children, these blood lead levels can decrease over time. If you or your child have high blood lead levels, identifying the source of lead in your environment and removing that source can reduce blood lead levels and stop further health effects of lead poisoning.

9. The Childhood Lead Poisoning Program at the Arizona Department of Health Services can answer your questions.

This program receives reports of blood lead levels in Arizona children and provides follow-up with healthcare providers and families for children with elevated levels. When a child is identified with elevated blood lead levels, the program will coordinate follow-up testing and work with families to identify the source of lead. Resources and information are available at www.azhealth.gov/lead, by calling 602-364-3118, or by emailing healthyhomes@azdhs.gov.

10. If you are still concerned about whether your child may be lead poisoned, a simple blood test can help.

Because drinking water is not a common source of lead in Arizona, we do NOT recommend that your child receives a blood lead test based on elevated levels of lead at his/her school. However, if you are concerned that your child may be exposed to other sources of lead at home, your healthcare provider can help you get your child’s blood tested to determine whether there is a potential health concern due to lead.