



## **Arizona Public School Drinking Water Lead Screening Program Frequently Asked Questions for Schools**

### **If people were exposed to lead at our school, what are the primary health concerns?**

It is unlikely that people will experience health issues as a result of exposure to drinking water at school. In general, young children are most at risk for lead poisoning because they are still developing, have a tendency to put objects in their mouths, and absorb lead easily. In children, lead poisoning can cause slowed development, reading and other learning problems, behavior problems, as well as brain, liver, and kidney damage. Pregnant women can also pass lead to their unborn babies.

### **How can I tell if a child or staff member at our school is suffering from lead poisoning?**

It is unlikely that anyone is suffering from lead poisoning as a result of exposure to drinking water at school. However, other sources of lead are present in Arizona, which people may be exposed to. These 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. Most people with lead poisoning look healthy and show no signs of illness. The only way to detect lead poisoning is by asking a doctor to perform a simple blood test. This is not recommended solely based on elevated levels of lead found in your school's water.

### **The lead levels at our school are above 15ppb (parts per billion). Should we be concerned?**

Lead in water measured above 15 ppb does not necessarily mean people will have elevated blood lead levels in their bodies. 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. In addition, the lead 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.

People's exposure to lead in drinking water at a school is only a small part of their overall potential exposure. In fact, 15 ppb is a level set by the Environmental Protection Agency for lead in tap water within homes. Individuals are much more likely to drink and cook with water from their home in larger quantities than they are at school.

### **Where did the lead in the school's water come from?**

When lead is detected, it does not usually come from the water itself. Typically, the lead leaches out of plumbing and building fixtures, like 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. Over time, the Environmental Protection Agency has updated regulations about lead-containing fixtures or solder. Solder and plumbing fixtures containing lead are more common in plumbing systems put in place prior to 1986.



**Is it safe for people to wash their hands or shower at school?**

Yes, per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, bathing and showering should be safe for students and staff, even if the water contains lead over 15 ppb. Human skin does not absorb lead from water. Water at school can also be used to wash hands or clean cuts or scrapes. Washing hands or wounds with water at your school will not significantly increase a child's risk of lead poisoning.

**Is it safe to use our school's water at the nurse's station?**

Water at school can be used to wash hands, clean cuts or scrapes, or other wound care. Washing hands or wounds with water at your school will not significantly increase a child's risk of lead poisoning. Bottled water is recommended for drinking or dispensing medications.

**Is it safe for our cafeteria to use our school's water to cook with?**

If elevated lead levels were found in the building that houses your school's cafeteria, it is recommended that you use another source of water, like commercially bottled water, to prepare food that is likely to absorb water. For example, you should not cook pasta or clean porous foods like berries with water containing elevated lead levels, but it would be acceptable to rinse fresh, uncut produce like apples or oranges with the water. If you are using school water to rinse fresh produce, flush the faucet first by running it on cold for 30 seconds to 2 minutes 1-2 minutes before using it. You may also consider installing a NSF-certified filter to remove lead.

**Is it safe to use our school's water to wash dishes?**

Yes, it is safe to use your school's water to wash dishes, even if the dishwashing water source comes from a building found to have elevated levels of lead. It is recommended that you let the water run on cold for 30 seconds to 2 minutes before you begin washing dishes.

**Is it safe for our janitorial staff to clean with the water at our school?**

Yes, even if elevated levels of lead are found in the building your janitorial staff uses to get water for mopping or cleaning, you can still use that water. Lead is not absorbed through the skin. It must be eaten, drank, or inhaled at elevated levels to cause health effects. Therefore, it is appropriate for your janitorial staff to continue using your school's water for cleaning floors or surfaces.

**Is it safe to use water in our classrooms for educational purposes (e.g., boiling it for a science class)?**

Yes, as long as no individuals are drinking the water or using it for cooking as part of the class activity, the water is safe to use. Boiling the water will not remove the lead from the water, but it also will not cause increased health concerns for staff or students.

**Is it safe for students or staff to drink the water at our school?**

While the levels of lead detected in the water at school are not likely to pose a health concern, we recommend that no one drinks from any water sources in a building found to have elevated levels of lead in that water. Students and staff who will not have access to other drinking water sources on campus with less than 15 ppb of lead should bring water from home or drink bottled water.



### **What can our school do to reduce levels of lead in drinking water?**

If the lead levels in your school drinking water are higher than the action level of 15 ppb, your school should work to determine the source of lead. There are a number of ways lead levels can be reduced in school drinking water, such as initiating a flushing program, or by replacing pipes and fixtures. Below are some ways in which you can reduce levels of lead in your drinking water:

- Let the water run 30 seconds to 2 minutes prior to using a fountain or a faucet for drinking or food preparation to reduce lead levels in the water;
- Install a NSF-certified filters to remove lead;
- Clean aerators on a quarterly basis – more if debris buildup is observed
- Remove or replace fixtures that leach lead
- Flush the piping system in the building
- Repair the plumbing system

### **Do students or staff at our school need to be tested for lead exposure?**

It is not recommended that students or staff are tested for lead exposure based on a lead reading above 15 ppb in water at your school. However, if anyone is concerned about being exposed to lead from additional sources in their home or community, they can talk to their doctor about a simple blood test.

### **What are the common sources of lead in Arizona?**

Drinking water is not a common source of lead in Arizona. In Arizona, 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.

### **What can our families do to protect themselves from lead exposure at home?**

While your school is working to address elevated lead levels detected in water at your facility, there are several things families can do to reduce potential lead exposures outside of school. You can advise families to:

- Check their homes for items that may contain lead. Wash their children’s hands often, especially after playing outside and before eating.
- If their work or hobby involves working with lead, change clothes and shower before entering the home. Wash clothes separately. Leave shoes/boots outside or in the garage to avoid bringing in soil and dust.
- Mop hard floors and wet-wipe surfaces to contain lead dust. Avoid sweeping or dry dusting.
- Hire an EPA-certified firm when renovating or repairing pre-1978 homes. EPA-certified firms are trained and certified to work lead-safe. Find a list of certified contractors on the EPA website.

Families can contact the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program if they would like help in identifying sources in their home that may have lead at [healthyhomes@azdhs.gov](mailto:healthyhomes@azdhs.gov) or 602-364-3118.