

Let it run. . . and get the lead out!

Important information on how to protect your health

Lead is a common metal that has been in many consumer products but is now known to be harmful to human health if ingested or inhaled. It can be found in lead-based paint, air, soil, household dust, food, some types of pottery, and drinking water. When people come in contact with lead, it may enter their bodies and accumulate over time, resulting in damage to the brain, nervous system, red blood cells, and kidneys.

The following is information about lead in drinking water: why it is a cause for concern, how it enters water, and most importantly, simple precautions you can take to protect you and your family.

Why is lead in drinking water a problem?

Drinking water is not our only source of lead exposure. However, combined with other sources, lead in water can increase the build-up of lead in our bodies. Lead in water can be a special problem for infants, whose diets may be mostly liquids, such as baby formulas or concentrated juices mixed with water. Smaller bodies can absorb lead more rapidly than bigger ones, so amounts of lead that won't hurt an adult can be very harmful to a child. A child's mental and physical growth can be permanently harmed by too much lead.

How does lead get into my drinking water?

Lead is rarely found in natural sources of water such as rivers and lakes or underground aquifers. However, it may work its way into drinking water after the water has left the treatment plant and is on its way to people's faucets. This usually happens through the corrosion of materials containing lead in household plumbing. These materials include brass faucets, lead solder on copper pipes, lead pipes, or lead service lines connecting the water main to the inside plumbing.

Lead pipes are no longer installed for service lines or in household plumbing, and lead solder has been outlawed in Minnesota since 1985. The amount of lead allowed in brass faucets has also been limited, but can still contribute some lead to drinking water (note that many faucets are made of brass even if they do not have a "brass" color). Even with these restrictions in place, some homes—especially older homes—may still have significant amounts of lead in their plumbing systems.

How can I reduce lead in my drinking water?

Let It Run. Flush taps before using water from them for drinking or cooking. Water that stands idle in pipes for long periods of time—such as overnight or during the day when people are gone to work and school—is more likely to absorb materials from the plumbing system. The best way to rid the pipes of water that may contain lead is to let the cold-water faucet run until you feel that the water is as cold as it will get. The amount of time this takes will depend on your home and how its plumbing is arranged—but you should always run the water for at least 60 seconds. If your home has a lead service line (which you can determine by asking your local water utility), you should flush water for an additional 2 to 3 minutes to make sure you are getting fresh water from the water main. Be sure to flush standing water before using any water for drinking or cooking purposes.

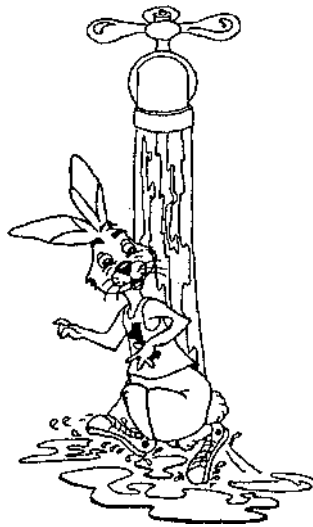
Tips for flushing:

- 💧 Other household water uses will also help clear standing water from your home's plumbing. For example, you may want to establish a routine of doing household tasks that use water—such as showering, flushing the toilet, or running the dishwasher—first thing in the morning before using water for drinking or cooking. Keep in mind that you'll still need to flush individual faucets for a short time before using them for drinking water.
- 💧 The water you run from drinking water taps does not have to be wasted. You can use this water for cleaning purposes or for watering plants.
- 💧 You may want to keep a container of drinking water in your refrigerator, so you don't have to run water every time you need it.

Use Only Cold Water for Cooking and Drinking. Hot water dissolves lead more quickly than cold water, so don't use water from your hot-water faucet for cooking or drinking. If you need hot water for cooking or drinking, take water from the cold tap and heat it. It is especially important not to use the hot water for making baby formula.

Will water treatment devices help?

Some treatment devices can reduce the amount of lead in your drinking water. Reverse-osmosis and distillation units can be used for that purpose. A few types of water filters also remove lead. Check the product literature to be sure it has been certified for lead removal by NSF International (<http://nsf.org>). Also, you must follow the manufacturer's recommendations for operation and maintenance to ensure that the treatment equipment works correctly.



Let it run!

How can I get my water tested for lead?

Testing for lead can help determine if there is too much in your drinking water. Many laboratories can test your water to see if there is a lead problem. Fees will vary between labs. Check your Yellow Pages under "Laboratories-Testing."



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