

Lead in Drinking Water

For parents or guardians of children attending school or child care

What is lead?

Lead is a naturally occurring metal that can be found throughout the environment – the air, the soil, the water, and even inside our homes. This metal has been used in a wide variety of products including paint, ceramics, pipes and plumbing materials, solders, gasoline, batteries, ammunition, chain link fences, and cosmetics.

How does lead get into drinking water?

Lead is not typically present in the treated water or source water supplied to your home, schools or child care centers. Lead can enter drinking water from the service line (pipes) that connects a home or business to the distribution line (water main), solder in copper piping, and brass faucet fixtures. Until several decades ago, lead pipes were widely used for service lines and connections that carry drinking water from distribution lines to homes and businesses. More recently, federal regulations have lowered the maximum lead content allowed in plumbing products that come into contact with drinking water. However, brass faucets and fittings sold as late as 2013 could contain lead and older pipes with lead-based solder could still be present in building structures, posing a risk for lead exposure in people.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there is no safe level for lead in drinking water. In 1991, the EPA published rules

that required community water providers to sample for lead from homes determined to be at high risk of contamination. There currently is no Colorado or federal law requiring schools or child care centers to test water for lead.



What are the health effects of lead?

Lead exposure can cause health effects if too much lead accumulates in a person's body. Infants and children are more susceptible to the health effects of lead because their bodies absorb more lead than adults. Adults can be exposed to higher concentrations of lead than children before experiencing health effects.

(over)

What are the health effects of lead?

Health effects of lead exposure in children include:

- ◆ Behavior problems
- ◆ Difficulty learning
- ◆ Lower IQs
- ◆ Hearing loss
- ◆ Delayed physical or mental development

Health effects of lead exposure in adults include:

- ◆ Fatigue
- ◆ Difficulty with memory or concentration
- ◆ Hearing loss
- ◆ High blood pressure
- ◆ Kidney problems
- ◆ Reproductive problems
- ◆ Miscarriage or premature birth in pregnant women



What are other sources of lead exposure?

There are many other common sources of lead in Colorado homes to be aware of, including:

- ◆ Chipping, peeling, or flaking lead-based paint in homes built before 1978
- ◆ Lead brought into the home from work in lead-related industries such as mining, welding, or plumbing
- ◆ Exposure from hobbies such as shooting with lead ammunition
- ◆ Lead- contaminated soil

What if your child's school or child care center reports lead was measured in the water?

Tri-County Health Department recommends schools or child care centers take action if water contains lead that exceeds EPA's action level of 15 parts per billion. Actions might include replacing fixtures or doing additional testing to determine the source of lead.

It is unlikely that occasional exposure to lead-contaminated water alone would cause an elevated blood lead level in people. Also consider the other types of lead exposure that can occur. If you are concerned about lead exposure, talk to your health care provider. A blood test can be done to check your child's lead level.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has information available at www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/parents.htm.



Additional Questions?

For additional questions, contact Tri-County Health Department at 720-200-1670.