

# LEAD NOTIFICATION PROGRAM

## INFORMATION SHEET

### LEAD IN OUR ENVIRONMENT

#### HOW LEAD ENTERS OUR WATER

Lead is unusual among drinking water contaminants in that it seldom occurs naturally in water supply reservoirs. Lead enters drinking water primarily as a result of corrosion or wearing away of materials containing lead in the household plumbing. These materials include lead-based solder used to join copper pipes, brass and chrome-plated faucets. In many communities, installation of lead service lines was common until about 60 years ago. We have never found evidence of lead service lines in our community. Hence, it appears the use of lead service lines was not the practice of plumbers in this area.

To reduce the major sources of lead in our drinking water, Congress, in 1986, banned the use of lead solder containing greater than 0.2 percent lead and restricted the lead content of the faucets, pipes and other plumbing materials to 8.0 percent.

When water stands in plumbing systems containing lead for several hours or more, the lead in the solder may dissolve into the drinking water. This means the first draw of water from the tap in the morning, or if no one is at home all day, later in the afternoon, can contain fairly high levels of lead.

#### HEALTH EFFECTS OF LEAD

Lead is a common metal found throughout the environment in lead-based paint, air, soil, household dust, food, certain types of pottery, porcelain, pewter and water. Lead can pose a significant risk to your health if too much of it enters your body.

#### LEAD IN DRINKING WATER

Lead builds up in the body over many years and can cause damage to the brain, red blood cells and kidneys. The greatest risk is to young children (especially under age 6), pregnant women and their fetuses. Amounts of lead that will not hurt adults can slow down normal mental and physical development in the growing bodies of children. Health officials express concern that children at play often come into contact with sources of lead contamination - like dirt and dust that rarely affect an adult. If a child puts dirty fingers into his/her mouth (as most children do), some lead may be absorbed into the child's system. These officials suggest washing children's hands and toys often and attempting to keep everything out of their mouths but food.

Lead in drinking water, although rarely the sole cause of lead poisoning, can if there are

high levels of lead in your drinking water, significantly increase your total exposure. This is particularly true for infants who drink baby formulas and concentrated juices that are mixed with water. The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimates that on a nationwide basis, drinking water could be the source of up to 20 percent or more of your total exposure to lead.

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE IN THE HOME TO REDUCE EXPOSURE TO LEAD IN DRINKING WATER

Have your drinking water tested to determine if it contains excess concentrations of lead to find out whether you need to take action in your home. Testing the water is essential because you cannot see, taste, or smell lead in drinking water. This analysis can be performed by the Westchester County Department of Laboratories and Research, 2 Dana Road, Valhalla, (914) 231-1715.

If a water test indicates that drinking water drawn from a tap in your home contains lead above 15 parts per billion, you should take the following precautions:

1. Flush your system. Flushing tap water is a simple measure you can take to protect your family. To flush, let the water run from the tap before using it for drinking or cooking any time the water in the faucet has gone unused for more than 6 hours. The longer the water remains in your home's plumbing, the more lead it may contain. Flushing the tap means running the cold water faucet until the water gets noticeably colder, usually about 30 seconds. Although toilet flushing or showering flushes water through the major portion of your home's plumbing system, you still need to flush the water in each faucet a few seconds before using it for cooking or drinking. Since your faucet can be a major source of lead, always run the faucet before using it for cooking or drinking purposes.

To conserve water, fill a container with water while flushing the tap whenever possible, using this first flush water to water plants or other uses not involving potability criteria.

If you live in a multi-family building, letting the water flow before using it may not lessen your risk from lead. The piping in these buildings is often larger than that in a single family home resulting in less effectiveness from flushing. In these cases, your co-op or condo board may need to hire an environmental specialist to locate the source of the lead and provide advice on reducing the lead level.

2. Use only cold water for cooking and drinking. Do not cook with or drink water from the hot water tap. Hot water dissolves lead more quickly than cold water. If you need hot water, draw water from the cold water tap and heat it on the stove.

3. Remove loose solder and debris from plumbing materials installed in newly constructed homes and homes in which the plumbing has recently been replaced. To do this, remove the faucet strainer from all taps and run the water for 3 to 5 minutes. Thereafter, periodically remove the strainers and flush out debris that has accumulated

over time.

4. Identify and replace lead materials with a lead-free substance. If your copper pipes are joined with lead solder that has been installed illegally since it was banned in 1986, notify the plumber who did the work and request that he/she replace the lead solder with lead-free solder. Lead solder looks dull gray and when scratched with a key looks shiny. In addition, notify the New York State Department of Health about the violation.

5. Determine whether the service line that connects your home is made of lead. Lead service lines were used in some communities until the 1930's, but lead service lines were never used in the District. If your house is over 60 years old and you are concerned that the service may be lead, you may decide to hire a licensed plumber to inspect the line.

6. Have an electrician check your wiring. If grounding wires from the electrical system are attached to your pipes, corrosion may be greater. Check with an electrician to determine if your wiring can be grounded elsewhere.

**DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THE WIRING YOURSELF BECAUSE IMPROPER GROUNDING CAN CAUSE ELECTRICAL SHOCK AND BE A FIRE HAZARD.**

#### ADDITIONAL STEPS

The steps described above will reduce the lead concentration in your drinking water. However, if your water test indicates that the drinking water coming from your tap contains lead concentration in excess of 15 parts per billion after flushing, you may want to take the following additional measures:

7. Purchase or lease a home treatment device. Home treatment devices are limited in that each unit only treats water that flows from the faucet to which it is connected and all such devices require periodic maintenance or replacement. Devices, such as reverse osmosis systems or distillers, can effectively remove lead from your drinking water. Some activated carbon filters may reduce lead levels at the tap; however, all lead reduction claims should be investigated. Be sure to have a lead test performed to check the actual effectiveness of a specific home treatment device after installing the unit.

8. Purchase bottled water for drinking and cooking.

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