

## Iowa City Water Division

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Lead in Drinking Water

#### How does lead get into drinking water?

Lead seldom occurs naturally in water supplies, such as rivers and lakes. Lead enters drinking water primarily from corrosion or wearing away of materials containing lead, like lead-based solder used to join copper pipe, brass and chrome-plated brass faucets, and in some cases, pipes made of lead. Lead pipes that connect houses and buildings to water mains are also known as service lines. Lead may dissolve into water when water sits undisturbed in lead pipes or plumbing system containing lead.

#### Where can I find more information about lead in drinking water?

Places to learn more about lead in drinking water include the US EPA Basic Information about Lead in Drinking Water Website at [www.epa.gov/safewater/lead](http://www.epa.gov/safewater/lead), the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791, or call the Iowa City Water Division at 319-356-5160.

Sample results from lead testing are published in the annual **Consumer Confidence Report**. Current and previous reports can be found at <https://www.icgov.org/city-government/departments-and-divisions/public-works/water/water-quality-and-treatment>.

#### How do I test for lead in my drinking water?

To test for lead in your drinking water, contact the Iowa City Water Division at 319-356-5160 to schedule an appointment to have your water tested. Staff will help you evaluate your water service material, collect a sample, and submit the sample for analysis to a state certified laboratory. There is no fee for this service.

#### What laws regulate the amount of lead that can be found in drinking water?

All community water systems, including the Iowa City drinking water system, must comply with the **Lead and Copper Rule of 1991**. This rule is part of the Safe Drinking Water Act and requires water systems to monitor levels of lead and copper in drinking water at customer water taps.

The Rule sets an Action Level of 0.015 mg/L (or 15 parts per billion) for lead concentration in more than 10 percent of the samples taken at designated locations throughout the system. If the Action Level is exceeded, the water system must complete additional steps to control lead levels in the drinking water. The Rule also requires every system to publish the results in its annual **Consumer Confidence Report**. Since 1992, the Iowa City public water distribution system has remained in compliance with this rule.

In addition to the tri-annual testing requirements, the Lead and Copper Rule also requires water systems to monitor the stability of their drinking water. Certified Iowa City Water Division staff analyze water samples daily and adjust treatment processes to ensure water entering the distribution system is stable and non-corrosive.

**Can commercially available water filters remove lead out of drinking water?**

There are many water filters available on the market that remove lead and other metals from water. It is important to read the filter label and user manual to understand what it removes, how much it removes, and how often it needs to be replaced or serviced for optimal filtration. Some filters may also have requirements on where they can be placed in the home or plumbing system.

**Who is most susceptible to lead in drinking water?**

Infants, children, and pregnant women are typically more vulnerable to lead in drinking water than the general population. Lead in drinking water can increase a person's total lead exposure, particularly for infants who drink baby formulas and concentrated juices that are mixed with water. Lead can build up in the body over many years and cause damage to the brain, red blood cells, and kidneys. The greatest potential exposure to lead for all age groups is still through ingesting and breathing in lead paint chips and dust. Family doctors, pediatricians, or County Health professionals can provide more information about the health effects of lead.

**What can I do if I find out lead is in my drinking water?**

If you are a customer of the City of Iowa City water system, including University Heights residents, contact the Iowa City Water Division at 319-356-5160 if you test your water and find unacceptable lead levels. Staff will help you research how lead is getting into your drinking water, and develop a list of actions you can take to lower or remove the concentration of lead in your drinking water.

**Who is responsible for removing lead from a water system?**

The Iowa City Water Division is responsible for ensuring the water it distributes is non-corrosive and all materials installed in the distribution system and water meters are considered "lead-free" as defined by law. Individual homeowners or property owners are responsible for the maintenance and replacement of their own water service line and plumbing.

**Where can I find information about the material my water service line is made of?**

The best way to determine if a home's service line is made of lead is by hiring a licensed plumber to inspect the line, or contacting the contractor who installed the line. A licensed plumber can also check if a home's plumbing contains lead solder, lead pipes, or pipe fittings that contain lead. To see if any plumbing work in your home was permitted in the past, contact the Iowa City Neighborhood and Development Services Department at 319-356-5122 or the City of University Heights at 319-337-6900.

**Do I need to worry about owning a lead line or older plumbing?**

Having lead pipe or solder in your water service does not automatically mean your drinking water contains lead. The only way to know if you have lead in your drinking water is to have your water tested. If you disturb any lead for maintenance or repairs, it is recommended that the entire lead section is removed from use and the building's plumbing thoroughly flushed.

## How can I minimize the amount of lead in my drinking water?

1. **Let the water run from the tap before using it for drinking or cooking** anytime the water in a faucet has gone unused for more than six hours. Flushing the tap means running the cold-water faucet until the water gets noticeably colder, usually about 15 to 30 seconds. Although toilet flushing or showering flushes water through a portion of the plumbing system, you still need to flush the water in each faucet before using it for drinking or cooking. It usually uses less than one or two gallons of water per day to flush the pipes.
2. **Do not cook with, or drink water from the hot water tap.** Hot water can dissolve more lead more quickly than cold water. If you need hot water, draw water from the cold tap and heat it on the stove, in a kettle, or in a microwave. Boiling water does not remove lead, and prolonged boiling can concentrate lead levels.
3. **Remove loose lead solder and debris from the plumbing materials** installed in newly constructed homes, or homes in which the plumbing has recently been replaced, by removing the faucet strainers from all taps and running the water from three to five minutes. Thereafter, periodically remove the strainers and flush out any debris that has accumulated over time.
4. **Have an electrician check your wiring.** If grounding wires from the electrical system are attached to your pipes, corrosion may be greater. Check with a licensed electrician or your local electrical code to determine if your wiring can be grounded elsewhere. **Do not** attempt to change the wiring yourself as improper grounding can cause electrical shock and fire hazards.
5. **Properly operate and maintain any in-home water treatment devices.** Improperly operated in-home treatment devices can increase the potential for your water to become corrosive and leach out lead found in your plumbing or fixtures.
6. **Determine if the service line that connects your home or apartment to the water main is made of lead.** The best way to determine if your service line is made of lead is by hiring a licensed plumber to inspect the line. A licensed plumber can also check to see if your home's plumbing contains lead solder, lead pipes, or pipe fittings that contain lead.
7. **You can consult a variety of sources for additional information.** Your family doctor or pediatrician can perform a blood test for lead and provide you with information about the health effects.
8. **Have your drinking water tested** to determine if it contains excessive concentrations of lead. Testing the water is essential because you cannot see, taste, or smell lead in drinking water. For more information on having your water tested, contact the Iowa City Water Division at 319-356-5160.