Lead and Drinking Water

Lead is a highly poisonous metal and can affect almost every organ in the body and the nervous system. People can be exposed to lead through inhalation, ingestion and to a lesser extent, dermal contact. Because they absorb more lead than adults and because their brains and nervous systems are still developing, children under 6 and the developing fetus are most susceptible to lead exposure. The most common source of lead exposure is ingestion of old lead paint. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that lead in drinking water can be 20% or more of a person’s lead exposure.

Getting the Lead Out: To protect public health, we must reduce lead exposure at the drinking water tap. To make this a reality Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund are:

- advocating for proper implementation of the Safe Drinking Water Act’s Lead and Copper Rule (LCR), including effective “corrosion control” at drinking water treatment plants to prevent lead leaching out of pipes and plumbing fixtures and monitoring to assess lead in water systems;
- working for improvements in the LCR, which the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will update in 2020. Visit [www.cleanwater.org/LCRComment](http://www.cleanwater.org/LCRComment) to learn about EPA’s Fall 2019 proposed LCR revisions;
- supporting communities and water systems in replacing lead service lines and taking other steps to get lead out of contact with drinking water.

Health Impacts of Lead

**CHILDREN**
- **Brain**
  - Behavior problems, lower IQ, hearing loss, learning disabilities
- **Kidneys**
  - Anemia
- **Nervous System**
  - Damage
- **Body**
  - Decreased bone and muscle growth

**ADULTS**
- **Brain**
  - Memory loss, lack of concentration, headaches, irritability, depression.
- **Body**
  - Fatigue, joint and muscle pain
- **Cardiovascular**
  - High blood pressure
- **Kidneys**
  - Abnormal function and damage
- **Digestive System**
  - Constipation, nausea and poor appetite
- **Nervous System**
  - Damage including numbness and pain in the extremities
- **Reproductive System**
  - Men: Decreased sex drive and sperm count, and sperm anomalies. Women: Spontaneous miscarriage
Protect Yourself from Lead in Drinking Water

- **Learn about lead levels in your community.** Every year, public water systems prepare a Consumer Confidence Report (CCR), which includes information on lead monitoring results. For more information and help finding your CCR: [https://www.epa.gov/ccr](https://www.epa.gov/ccr). Water systems also post lead monitoring results online.
- **Run your water before drinking or cooking.** The longer water sits in pipes, the more lead it may contain. When water has not been used for 6 hours or more, running water 1–3 minutes until it becomes cold can help ensure you are not using water that has been sitting in the pipes. This water can be used for watering plants or other non-consumption uses.
- **Have your water tested.** If you are concerned about lead in your tap water you can test for lead and other contaminants. Some water systems will provide lead testing for their customers. Others will provide information on local laboratories and other resources. There are low cost tests available. Call your water system to see if testing is available.
- **Use cold water for drinking and eating.** Cold water is less likely to contain lead. Never add warm water to baby formula. Boiling water will not remove lead.
- **Choose the right filter.** Only specific products are designed to reduce lead contamination. If you choose to use filters, consult your water system and learn more about products: [http://bit.ly/NSFlead](http://bit.ly/NSFlead)