FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Lead in Drinking Water at Schools & Child Care Facilities

1. What is lead?

Lead is a naturally occurring metal that can be found in air, soil, dust, and water. Lead can cause health problems if too much enters the body from any of these sources. The greatest risk of lead exposure is to infants, young children and pregnant women. The New Jersey Department of Health website provides further information on the health effects of lead, http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/newborn/lead.shtml.

2. How does lead get into a school's drinking water?

Lead can enter a school's drinking water twofold. First, lead can be present in the source water that is used for a drinking water supply. Lead enters surface waters (i.e.: rivers, lakes, or streams) through discharges from industrial or municipal wastewater treatment plants or when lead in the air settles into these surface waters. Lead is rarely found in source water in New Jersey. Lead can also enter a school's drinking water after interacting with the school's plumbing materials containing lead. These include lead pipe and lead solder, which was commonly used until 1986, or components made of brass. This chemical interaction of water with such materials is referred to as corrosion. Corrosion is accelerated by water quality characteristics such as low pH, high water temperature and extended contact. The extent to which corrosion occurs contributes to the amount of lead that can be released into the drinking water.

3. What is a lead action level?

The lead action level is a threshold established by the United States Environmental Protection Agency for lead in drinking water for public water supplies. The lead action level is 15 µg/l (micrograms per liter), which may also be expressed as 15 ppb (parts per billion). This same action level, or threshold, is used in the NJ Department of Education regulations for water outlets in schools and child care facilities that provide water for drinking or food preparation.

4. Is there anything I can do to reduce my child's exposure to lead in drinking water?

- Run the water to flush out lead. Let the water run from the tap before using it for drinking or cooking any time the water in a faucet has gone unused for more than six hours. The longer the water resides in plumbing the more lead it may contain. Flushing the tap means running the cold water faucet for about 15-30 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. Flushing tap water is a simple and inexpensive measure you can take to protect your health. It usually uses less than one gallon of water.
- Use cold water for cooking and preparing baby formula. Do not cook with or drink water from the hot water tap. Hot water can dissolve lead more quickly than cold water. If you need hot water, draw water from the cold tap and then heat it. Do not use water from the hot water tap to make baby formula.
- Do not boil water to remove lead. Boiling water will not reduce lead.

- Look for alternative sources or treatment of water. You may want to consider purchasing bottled water or a water filter. Be sure the filter is approved to reduce lead or contact NSF International at 1-800-NSF-8010 or www.nsf.org for information on performance standards for water filters. Be sure to maintain and replace a filter device in accordance with the manufacturer.
- Contact the community public water system that serves your home and inquire about lead testing of your home drinking water.

5. How can I know if my child has been exposed to lead?

The only method to determine a child's lead level is for them to have a blood lead test done by a health provider.

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