

Quick Guide for Reducing Lead Exposure After Testing

What if I get an elevated lead result?

Lead levels at the tap can vary throughout the day, depending on water use. If the results from your first test are higher than 0.005 mg/L, you may want to do another test using the method described in the next section.

Homes with infants, children, or pregnant women should consider immediate action to reduce lead in drinking water while waiting for the next set of test results. Immediate actions include:

- using an alternate water source of water (ex: bottled water) for drinking and preparing food, or
- buying a low-cost filter to reduce lead. Filters are available in point-of-use models that fit on the tap or pitcher-type models (see section on How to treat the water to reduce lead levels).

Water with lead should not be used to make formula for infants. Boiling the water will not reduce lead levels.

Increased lead in drinking water is only a concern if swallowed. It is safe to shower, bathe, wash dishes, and clean clothes using tap water with higher lead levels.

Additional sampling following elevated results

If the results from your first test are higher than 0.005 mg/L, you may want to do another test using a using the 30-minute stagnation method. This method requires you to run the tap at high flow for 5 minutes and then let the water sit or stagnate for 30 minutes. During stagnation, water should not be used anywhere in the house including toilets. After the 30 minute stagnation time, two one-litre (1-L) samples should be collected – one after the other – at a medium to high flow rate. The results of both samples will be averaged.

Since lead levels can vary throughout the day, this sampling protocol gives you additional information about lead levels at your household tap.

Understanding the test results

Though lead levels can vary throughout the day, the tests are intended to represent typical lead exposure from drinking water in your home or home-based child care facility. If the test results are higher than or close to the national guideline of 0.005 mg/L, take steps to reduce lead in your drinking water.

How to reduce exposure to lead from tap water

Use only cold tap water for drinking and cooking since hot water increases the leaching of lead.

Make sure the aerators screens on faucets used for drinking and cooking are periodically cleaned to remove any lead particles that may have accumulated there.

Treat the water using a filtration device certified to meet the NSF International (NSF)/American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standard for removal of lead. (See next section for details).

Avoid drinking discoloured water, which may contain temporarily elevated levels of lead or other contaminants.

Avoid drinking tap water that has been sitting in the plumbing system for a long time (ex: overnight or during the workday). Flush the toilet, take a shower, or start a load of laundry first thing in the morning or after work to clear the water from the service line; then run the tap used for drinking until the water is cold. Fill a container with cold fresh water and keep it in the fridge for drinking or cooking.

Flush the service line and plumbing system whenever water has been sitting for several hours by running the water for two to five minutes before using it for cooking or drinking. Water drawn off initially may be used for other purposes, such as watering plants or washing dishes.

If your house has a lead service line, the best way to reduce exposure is to replace it. This can be expensive. Check with your water supplier for information on lead service line replacement programs in your community. Your water supplier is generally responsible for the water distribution system until it reaches the homeowner's property. The portion of the lead service line from the property line or curb stop to the house is the homeowner's responsibility.

Most water system owners will replace the portion of the lead service line from the water main to the curb stop when they are doing water main upgrades, repairs, or replacements. Homeowners should replace the remaining portion from the curb stop to their home at the same time to minimize costs, maximize health benefits, and to avoid short term lead increases due to partial lead service line replacements.

How to treat the water to reduce lead levels

Drinking water treatment devices can be installed at the tap (point-of-use) or where the water enters the house (point-of-entry). Point-of-use devices are preferred for removal of lead as lead levels may increase as water moves through the household plumbing system. Lead is only a concern if ingested. Showering or bathing are not a concern; so, there is no need to treat water used for other purposes.

Point-of-use filters and treatment devices are typically installed at the kitchen tap, which is the tap most commonly used for drinking water.

Pitcher-type devices are also available. These devices do not require mounting to a tap.

The treatment device should be certified to meet the NSF International (NSF)/American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standard for removal of lead. Organizations that are accredited to certify devices to the NSF standard (including NSF itself) are listed below (see the organizations' respective websites for listings of certified products):

- NSF International (NSF) - [nsf.org](https://www.nsf.org)
- Canadian Standards Association (CSA) - [csagroup.org](https://www.csagroup.org)
- Underwriters Laboratories Incorporated (UL) - [ul.com](https://www.ul.com)
- International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO) - [iapmo.org](https://www.iapmo.org)
- Water Quality Association (WQA) - [wqa.org](https://www.wqa.org)

Certified devices are tested to ensure the safety of materials used in the devices and to ensure they perform as claimed.

Point-of-use devices certified to reduce lead in drinking water are often available from local home-improvement or plumbing stores.

Quotes may also be obtained from reputable water treatment equipment suppliers. Suppliers should provide information on how much lead will be removed, as well as maintenance requirements and costs.

Once installed, follow the manufacturer's instructions on the use and maintenance of treatment devices and disposal of filter media.

For additional information, see the fact sheet *Lead in Drinking Water: Information for Manitoba Homeowners and Home-based Child Care Providers*.