

Notice about lead levels in drinking water at your child's school, private school or child care centre

Ontario's Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks requires schools, private schools and child care centres to conduct regular testing for lead in drinking water.

Results from April 2020-March 2021 show that an exceedance of Ontario's standard for lead occurred at the school, private school or child care centre that your child attends on at least one occasion during that time period.

When lead in drinking water exceeds Ontario's standard, corrective action must be taken immediately. This includes ensuring that the tap is no longer accessible to children. The tap must remain inaccessible until the issue is resolved, and the water meets the standard.

We are sharing this information to ensure that you are aware of the corrective actions that may have been taken to address lead exceedances in drinking water at your child's school or child care centre to reduce exposures to lead.

Your child's school, private school or child care centre may have notified you of the exceedance and which corrective actions were taken to address the issue when it was identified.

For your awareness, test data results from April 2020 – March 2021 are posted on Ontario's Open Data Catalogue at ontario.ca/data/drinking-water-quality-and-enforcement.

Safe drinking water in Ontario's schools, private schools and child care centres

Ontario has the most comprehensive provincial testing regime for lead in drinking water in Canada. The province requires every fixture used to prepare food or provide drinking water to children in schools, private schools and child care centres to be sampled and tested for lead. The facilities are also required to flush their plumbing on a daily or weekly basis, depending on risk factors such as the age of the building and the facility's test results.

Corrective actions

The local public health unit and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks must be notified within 24 hours when a testing laboratory detects an exceedance of the standard for lead in a school, private school or child care centre's drinking water sample.

Facility owners must take immediate action, at any tap or fountain, where a test result from a flushed sample does not meet the standard. Facility owners must disconnect or cover the tap or fountain so that it is inaccessible to children until the issue is resolved, as well as take any other steps as directed by the local Medical Officer of Health.

Corrective actions can include:

- replacing or removing the fixture
- increasing flushing
- installing a filter certified for lead reduction
- resampling the fixture that had the exceedance
- taking any other measures as directed by the local Medical Officer of Health

When exceedances occur, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks staff follow up to confirm all corrective actions, including those required by the local medical officer of health, were implemented by the facility owner.

Facts about lead

Lead is a naturally occurring element that has many industrial uses. Exposure to lead can occur by inhalation of lead-containing particulates in air (especially smoke from cigarettes), contact with soil that contains lead, certain diets relying on imported canned food, some consumer products and from drinking water in buildings served by lead service lines and/or piping containing lead components including the solder. However, drinking water generally accounts for a small fraction of total lead exposure for most people.

It is important to note that children may be exposed to other sources of lead, including in the home through residential drinking water or old paint. Efforts should be made to reduce all sources of lead exposure.

In population studies, exposure to lead has been associated with effects on children's learning capacity, intellectual development and behaviour.

Blood lead levels of Canadians have declined by over 70 per cent in the past 40 years due to ongoing actions to reduce lead exposure from all sources. Levels in children between three and five years old dropped by 40 per cent from 2009 to 2017, showing that lead exposure is continually being reduced.

Ontario Drinking Water Quality Standards are intended to protect human health. The potential effects of lead at the current standard of 10 micrograms per litre are very subtle and would not be detectable on an individual level.

The ministry also continues to evaluate our already comprehensive lead protection framework to better understand the implications of adopting the more stringent federal guideline for lead as an Ontario standard and other potential actions to strengthen the regulatory framework.

For more information on the corrective action being taken please contact your school, private school or child care centre directly.

If you are concerned about the health of your child, you should visit your medical health professional to determine if a test of blood lead levels is appropriate.

For information on Ontario's strict framework, visit www.ontario.ca/page/flushing-and-sampling-lead or call the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks at 1-800-565-4923 or 1-855-515-1331.