

Notice about lead levels in drinking water at schools, private schools and child care facilities

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 and has posted the test data results from April 2019 – March 2020 on Ontario's Open Data Catalogue. The data shows that an exceedance of Ontario's strict 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 an exceedance(s) of the lead standard is identified in drinking water, a facility must take immediate corrective action, including ensuring that the tap is rendered inaccessible to children until the issue is resolved and the water meets the standard. This information is to help ensure that you are aware of the corrective actions that are taken to address lead concentrations 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 corrective actions that were taken to address the issue when it was identified.

The drinking water data are available at ontario.ca/data/drinking-water-quality-and-enforcement.

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

Ontario's drinking water is among the best protected in the world because we have a strong framework that helps safeguard the province's drinking water. Ontario also has the most rigorous 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.

Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health has not received any reports of lead toxicity in children in Ontario that have been linked to drinking water in the last 10 years.

Corrective Actions

The local public health unit and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks are 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.

It is important to understand that facilities must take immediate action, at any tap or fountain, where a test result from a flushed sample does not meet the standard. They must render the tap or fountain inaccessible to children by disconnecting or bagging it 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
- resampling the fixture that had the exceedance
- taking any other measures as directed.

When the standard is exceeded in schools, private schools and child care centres, the prescribed corrective actions ensure the safety of children and reduce lead in drinking water by using best available technologies and practices.

Throughout the year as the exceedances occur, as well as during inspections, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks staff ensure corrective actions issued by the local medical officer of health are followed and 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 homes 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.

To ensure the continued protection of Ontario's drinking water, the province will be updating its current policies and consulting on further actions to reduce levels of lead in drinking water.

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.