



Lead and Drinking Water: Frequently Asked Questions

In the wake of recent events in Flint, Michigan, the City of Duluth's Public Works and Utilities Department has received numerous inquiries regarding the safety of the city's water and the risks associated with lead exposure. In an effort to educate our customers, we are providing answers to the most commonly asked questions surrounding lead exposure in addition to this year's annual water quality report.

Is there lead in the City of Duluth water system?

Most of the lead in the water system is in service lines, therefore homes with lead services are at a higher risk than homes without lead services. The City stopped installing lead service lines on the City owned portion of a service in 1929. There are approximately two thousand lead water services owned by the City within the system. The City replaces these lead services anytime water main work is done in the area. The portion of a water service outside the street right of way is private and owned by the individual homeowner. It is unknown how many private lead pipes there are but it is likely greater than the two thousand publically owned.

What are the health effects of lead exposure?

Lead can accumulate in the body over time, causing permanent health effects. Adults may experience high blood pressure and kidney damage while infants and children are at risk for learning, behavior and other health problems. Parents of young children and pregnant women should be particularly aware of the risks associated with lead exposure.

What is the City of Duluth doing to prevent the exposure of its residents to lead?

Public Works and Utilities staff strive to provide clean, safe drinking water to residents. We are regulated by the Minnesota Department of Health, which acts on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency to implement the rules of the Safe Drinking Water Act.

In Duluth, treated water is pH-adjusted to reduce its corrosiveness as it travels through distribution and private plumbing systems. This is important since lead is not typically a problem at water treatment plants, but rather it leaches into the water as it travels to customer taps. By reducing the corrosiveness of the water, less lead leaches from home plumbing and service lines, reducing customers' exposure to lead.

In addition to corrosion control, the City of Duluth conducts scheduled monitoring of lead in water samples collected from homes with lead plumbing and/or service lines. The next round of testing is slated for this summer.

Who is most at risk?

Residents living in older homes are at greater risk since these structures are more likely to contain lead plumbing and/or be connected to a lead service line. A licensed plumber can identify lead pipes and solder inside the home. To determine whether your home has a lead service line, which connects the home to the water main, contact the City of Duluth Engineering Department at (218) 730-5200.

How can I test my water?

If your home contains lead plumbing or is connected to a lead service line, you may wish to have your water tested to determine your level of exposure. Samples should be collected after at least six hours of stagnation and be analyzed by a laboratory accredited by the Minnesota Department of Health. A list of such labs can be found at <https://eldo.web.health.state.mn.us/public/accreditedlabs/labsearch.seam>

How can I reduce my risk of exposure?

The most effective way to reduce your exposure to lead through drinking water is to remove lead plumbing components and service lines. Unfortunately, this option is expensive and not always feasible for homeowners. As an alternative, be sure to run the water for a few minutes before it is used for drinking or cooking. This will provide water from the main rather than the interior plumbing or service line, which could contain elevated levels of lead after periods of stagnation. Consume only cold water since lead dissolves more easily in hot water.

Where can I find more information?

For additional resources on lead, contact:

Minnesota Department of Health, (651) 201-4620

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/lead/index.html>

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/water/factsheet/com/leadcopper.pdf>

St Louis County Maternal Child Health, (218) 725-5210

<http://www.stlouiscountymn.gov/ADULTFAMILIES/ChildrenYouth/MaternalChildHealth.aspx>

City Of Duluth's Lakewood Water Treatment Plant, (218) 730-4160