

# Lead and keeping your drinking water safe

Lead in drinking water has become a hot-button issue across the nation following the 2016 water crisis in Flint, Michigan. Lehigh County Authority (LCA) has a number of provisions in place for testing for lead in our water and keeping it safe for all customers. Still, there are a number of things that you can do to make sure that lead is not an issue in your home. The most important thing is being informed and taking action if you might have a problem with lead.



## What is lead and where is it found?

Lead is a metal that is found naturally all over the world. It can be toxic to humans and animals if it is swallowed or inhaled. Lead can be found in many parts of our environment—air, soil, water, and even inside our homes. In water, it is colorless and odorless. Lead and lead compounds have been used in a wide variety of products, including paint, ceramics, pipes and plumbing materials, gasoline, batteries, and cosmetics. As we've learned more about the dangers of lead, fewer and fewer products with lead in them are being made today.

## What is lead poisoning?

Lead is harmful to everyone. Pregnant women and their unborn babies, infants and children under the age of six and adults with high blood pressure and kidney problems are at the most risk. Lead poisoning is a medical condition where lead, a heavy metal, builds up in the body. It can occur in adults, but is typically a greater problem among children. It can result in a number of conditions:

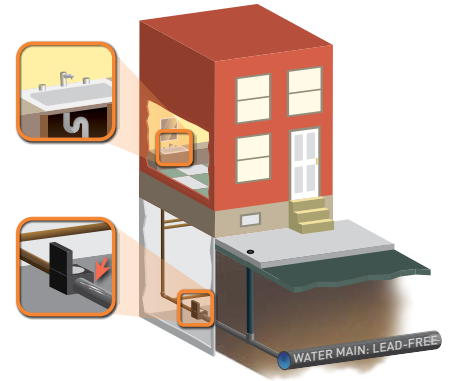
- Developmental delays
- Learning difficulties
- Irritability
- Loss of energy
- Weight loss
- Vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Lack of appetite
- Constipation
- Hearing loss

## Where does LCA's drinking water come from and how is it tested?

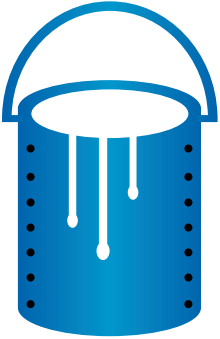
The drinking water from LCA's water sources (creeks, spring and wells) is naturally lead free. However, if homes and buildings have lead water pipes or plumbing containing lead, there is a risk for having lead get into the water. This is important for customers to understand, because you might need to take action to reduce the risk of lead exposure.

Currently, LCA tests for lead in tap water every three years at 50 representative taps of vulnerable homes in the City of Allentown, and at more than 150 homes across all of our service areas in Lehigh and Northampton counties. We do this according to the requirement of the Environmental Protection Agency's Lead and Copper Rule. >>

The testing results are used to determine if our water continues to be non-corrosive, so that water has minimum potential for lead to leach from your home's plumbing. So far, our test results show that the non-corrosive properties of LCA's water is working to keep lead levels to a minimum.



## How do I know if I have a problem in my home?



The risk of lead exposure will vary from home-to-home. In many homes, the risk may be from lead-based paint. In general, older homes with lead service lines of lead plumbing have the potential for more lead problems than newer homes. But that's not always the case. Some newer homes with copper service lines and plastic interior piping can have lead in their tap water due to other factors such as water softeners, brass fixtures or lead solder inside the home. Also, the common practice of grounding electrical connections to water pipes also can increase lead corrosion.

LCA helps to minimize your exposure to lead in water by controlling corrosive properties that could contribute to lead leaching from the pipes as it travels from our mains through your home's pipes to get to your tap.

While lead service lines between our mains and your home's plumbing might be a problem, replacing them is not always the solution. Focusing only on lead service lines can draw attention away from other issues that you might need to address to reduce risk of exposure. In fact, replacing a lead service line can increase lead levels at the tap under certain conditions. Each home should be tested and evaluated individually.

## What are other ways I can protect my family from lead poisoning?

People can prevent lead poisoning through removing sources of lead in the home. Some tips include:

- Keep children away from lead paint and lead dust.
- Clean around windows, play areas, and floors often.
- If you notice chipping paint, cover it right away with contact paper or duct tape and repair it quickly.
- Check your house for lead, and make sure all repairs are done safely without stirring up lead dust.
- Get your children tested for lead at age 12–24 months.
- Give your children foods with calcium, iron, and vitamin C, which may help keep lead out of the body.



## Lowering the risk of lead in your tap water is easy and free.

If you think you have lead plumbing, follow these easy steps. If you're not sure, visit [www.lehighcountyauthority.org](http://www.lehighcountyauthority.org) for a fact sheet on how to check your pipes for lead.

- Flush out your cold water spigot for three minutes first thing in the morning before drinking or cooking with the water
- To save water, flushing can also be accomplished by using water for other purposes like showering, flushing toilets or laundry
- Don't use hot water for cooking or drinking
- If you have a filter, change the cartridge according to the manufacturer's recommendations
- Make sure your water softener (if you have one) only softens the hot water
- Contact LCA about our water testing program if you're interested in having your tap water tested for lead.