



## **Frequently Asked Questions: Water Lead Levels in the City of Flint September 2015**

### **How can lead get into drinking water?**

Lead detections in Flint drinking water exist at the home level. Sampling at the Flint Water Treatment Plant has shown no lead in its treated water. However, this contaminant leaches into water from a home's lead service lines, lead solder, and leaded plumbing materials including fixtures, faucets, and fittings.

### **Does the city meet federal drinking water standards for lead and copper?**

Yes, the city is meeting state and federal guidelines for lead and copper.

The City of Flint has regularly monitored for lead and copper since federal law began requiring it in 1991.

When the City changed water sources in May 2014, state and federal law required the city to sample for lead and copper for a full year to determine how the water may be interacting with residential lead plumbing to increase lead levels. While the city's results show residential lead levels below the federal threshold for immediate response activities, Flint is moving quickly to optimize corrosion control measures in its water system.

### **Some individual homes showed high numbers for lead. Isn't that a concern?**

For the homeowner, yes it is. There is no "safe" level for lead, and while the leading cause of lead poisoning around the country is lead paint, any source of lead ingestion is worthy of concern.

But the State and federal guidelines for lead and copper acknowledge an important reality: Any home that has a lead service connection or lead plumbing will impart some varying amount of lead into the home's water. The only way to eliminate lead in a home water system is to remove lead plumbing or replace lead service connections to the city system.

The lead and copper rule requires the local operator to sample dozens, sometimes hundreds of homes in the service area to get a general sense of how the water supply is interacting with lead plumbing and service connections. The tests are done specifically at homes with lead service connections.

### **Are there other ways the city monitors for lead exposure?**

The County Health Department, overseen statewide by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, regularly monitors blood levels in children throughout Michigan communities. The leading cause of lead poisoning is exposure to lead paint.

Blood lead level testing results for the 12-month period just after the City of Flint changed its water source (May 2014 – April 2015) showed no significant change in the pattern of blood lead levels in Flint, compared to the previous three years. This data suggests the recent change in water source by the City of Flint has not contributed to an increase in lead exposure throughout the community.

### **How does the state decide if the water is creating a lead problem?**

Compliance with the federal lead rule is based on a 90<sup>th</sup> percentile calculation. If more than 10 percent of samples report lead above the federal action level of **15 parts per billion**, a water supply has an “action level exceedance.” An exceedance is not a violation. It triggers other requirements which could include public notification, additional water quality sampling, and possibly further treatment.

While some of Flint’s individual samples exceeded the 15 parts-per-billion lead action level, compliance is based on **the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of samples**. The City of Flint’s 90<sup>th</sup> percentile level has ranged between 0 parts per billion in 2008 and 2011, and 15 parts per billion in 1992, but never exceeded the action level.

The two most recent sampling periods, in 2014 and 2015, were 6 parts per billion and 11 parts per billion, respectively.

### **Did the city use every sample they got back?**

Sampling requirements for lead and copper are designed to target the most common pathways to lead ingestion in homes with the least protection. The sample must be collected from a commonly used kitchen or bathroom tap, and in accordance with the provided sampling instructions. Homes that employ filtration or additional treatment cannot be included. Samples must also be collected within the established monitoring period.

### **I have a lead service connection or lead plumbing. What should I do?**

Replacement is the only way to eliminate lead exposure. However, here are some interim steps homeowners can take to reduce it:

Flush pipes before drinking, and only use cold water for consumption.

The more time water has been sitting in your home's pipes, the more lead it may contain. When water in a particular faucet has not been used for six hours or longer, "flush" cold-water pipes by running the water until it becomes as cold as it will get. This could take five to 30 seconds if there has been recent water use elsewhere in the home, such as showering or flushing toilets. Otherwise, it could take two minutes or longer.

Use only water from the cold-water tap for drinking, cooking, and especially for making baby formula. Hot water is likely to contain higher levels of lead.

### **Who is responsible for replacement of lead materials?**

Replacement of service pipes on private property and any leaded plumbing materials within the home is a **homeowner's responsibility**. The City of Flint owns the service pipe from the water main to the curb stop valve, and that is **the City's responsibility**. This valve is normally located two feet in from the street curb. From there to the house is private property and the responsibility of the homeowner.

### **Why doesn't the city at least replace its portion of lead service lines?**

Partial lead service line replacement has been shown to mobilize more lead and make the situation worse. Only full lead service line replacement has been demonstrated effective in achieving long-term reductions in drinking water lead levels.

### **What is the City's timeline for installation of corrosion control treatment?**

The federal government allows the steps to complete the installation of optimal corrosion control treatment and follow-up monitoring to take up to five years.

However, the City of Flint has committed to completing installation of Optimized Corrosion Control Treatment in **less than six months**.

### **What will happen when Flint joins the Karegnondi Water Authority next year?**

The City has committed to having Optimized Corrosion Control Treatment in place prior to its connection with the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA). The water provided by KWA will come from a new source, Lake Huron. The city will continue its lead and copper sampling every six months. Additionally, the city's water treatment plant will continue to operate with uninterrupted Optimized Corrosion Control Treatment.

### **How long would it take to replace lead service lines throughout Flint?**

The city has about 32,900 service connections in total. **More than 15,000** of these connections are considered lead service lines. Even if many crews were contracted, it would likely take up to 15 years to complete this work.

### **What would it cost to replace the lead service line at my house?**

Average costs to replace a lead service line at an individual home range from \$2,000 to \$8,000. Costs vary depending on the length and size of service line that is needed, as well as the ground cover and soil conditions encountered.

With more than 15,000 lead service lines at an estimated average cost of \$4,000 for each replacement, total cost could **be \$60 million or more**.