



School districts required to test drinking water for lead in 2020

According to New York state law, all school districts are required to complete a new round of lead testing of water outlets used for drinking and cooking in 2020. Initial testing took place in 2016 when New York state became the first in the nation to require schools to test water for lead.

Water samples must be collected between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2020. If a water outlet is found to have a lead level above the state's "action level" of 15 parts per billion (ppb), a school district must:

- take immediate steps to prohibit the use of the outlet for drinking or cooking purposes;
- communicate results;
- implement a remediation plan; and
- ensure that students and staff have an adequate supply of water for drinking and cooking in the meantime.

Why are school districts testing for lead?

New York adopted these water testing regulations to help ensure that children are protected from lead exposure while in school. According to the state Department of Health, lead is a common metal found in the environment, but it is also a toxic material that can be harmful if ingested or inhaled. Although the primary source of lead exposure for most children is lead-based paint, exposure can also come from drinking water as a result of the lead content of plumbing materials and source water. While federal law now restricts the amount of lead used in new plumbing materials, the corrosion of older plumbing and fixtures in many buildings can cause lead to enter drinking water.

Where will districts test for lead?

School districts must collect samples to be tested from every possible source of water used for drinking and cooking in any buildings that may be occupied by students. These outlets include, but may not be limited to, drinking fountains (both bubbler and water-cooler types), kitchen sinks, classroom combination sinks/drinking fountains, student restroom sinks and nurse's office sinks. To comply with the regulations, water samples must be collected when water has been motionless for at least 8 hours but no more than 18 hours.

WHAT "LEAD-FREE" MEANS

New York's law does not require water testing in school buildings that are designated as "lead-free," as defined by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. It is important to understand that the term "lead-free" does not refer to the presence or absence of lead in water. A building can be deemed lead-free if it was built after Jan. 4, 2014, or a New York state licensed professional engineer or architect certifies it to be lead-free.

When will I know the results of water testing at my school?

That depends. The state has provided guidelines to school districts to complete water sampling between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2020. School districts will receive results depending upon how quickly the lab can turn the samples around and the timeframe in which the samples were submitted.

Once school districts receive the results, if any outlets exceed the action level, districts are required to notify all staff and parents/guardians in writing about the test results within 10 business days. Within six weeks of receiving the results, districts must post all results and any remediation plans on their websites. Districts must also report a list of any lead-free buildings on the website.

What happens if the lead level in my child's school exceeds the "action level"?

If test results show the lead concentration of water at an outlet exceeds the action level, schools must immediately prohibit the use of the outlet for drinking or cooking purposes and implement a remediation plan, under the guidance of the Department of Health, to address the issue. The outlet may not be used until follow-up test results indicate that lead levels are at or below the action level.

Are schools required to test for lead in the future?

Schools will need to conduct water testing every five years, or sooner, if required by the state Commissioner of Health.

What if I have more questions?

If you have health concerns, it is always best to consult your family's physician. For more information about lead in drinking water:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,
"Basic Information About Lead in Drinking Water"
<http://bit.ly/1TckaVX>
- NYS Department of Health,
"Lead in Drinking Water"
<https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/water/drinking/lead/>

BY THE NUMBERS

**1**

New York was the first state in the nation to require schools to test water for lead.

**15**

Lead in water is measured in parts per billion (ppb). 15 ppb is the "action level" established by the new state regulations.

**8**

All water samples must be "first draw," which means there has been no water flow for at least 8 hours.

