

City and County of San Francisco
Public Utilities Commission
Water Quality Division
Telephone: (650) 652-3100

WHAT IS LEAD?

Lead is a toxic metal found in natural deposits as ores containing other elements. Children who get lead into their body may develop learning or behavioral problems. Lead can damage children's brains, kidneys and other organs.

WHERE DOES LEAD COME FROM?

Lead was used in the production of many products including paints, leaded gasoline, as well as solder and pipes in plumbing. Although the use of lead in these products has been outlawed, lead may still be present in older homes.

HOW DO KIDS GET SICK FROM LEAD?

Most often, young children are exposed to lead by eating dust or paint chips containing lead. Additional sources of lead include imported candies, contaminated soil, or ceramic dishes with lead glazes. Lead may occur in drinking water either by contamination of the source water used by the water system, or by corrosion of lead plumbing or fixtures.

IS LEAD IN MY WATER?

Lead may occur in drinking water either by contamination of the source water used by the water system, or by corrosion of lead plumbing or fixtures. San Francisco's drinking water sources are free of lead, so corrosion of pipes or faucets containing lead is a greater cause for concern. For this reason, SFPUC removed all known lead service lines in the 1980s and has replaced over 95% of brass meters (which contain lead) with lead-free meters. However, some homes in San Francisco may have increased levels of lead in their tap water caused by deterioration of household plumbing materials that contain lead.

REFERENCES:

SFPUC: "Annual Report" - <http://sfwater.org/index.aspx?page=634>

SFPUC: "Lead-Free Faucets" - <http://sfwater.org/index.aspx?page=388>

SFDPH: "Childhood Lead Prevention Program" - <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/EH/CEHP/Lead/default.asp>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control - <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY HOME HAS OLDER PLUMBING?

- Flush the tap for 30 seconds to 2 minutes before using the water for drinking or cooking. Water in pipes and faucets might become contaminated with lead from brass faucets or lead solder when water has not been taken from the tap for more than 6 hours.
- Use only cold tap water to drink, cook, mix juice or prepare baby formula. If you need hot water, take it from the cold water tap and heat it.
- Many water filters do not take lead out. If you buy a water filter be sure that it says that it removes lead.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

- Inspect your home for lead hazards. Lead hazards include peeling paint and dust from remodeling or damaged paint.
- Keep children from playing in soil or dirt.
- Wash your children's hands, face, toys and everything they put in their mouth. Wash their hands with soap and water before meals and sleeping.
- Provide your children with a balanced diet. Foods rich in iron and calcium protect children's bodies from lead.
- Ask your doctor to test your children for lead.
- For more information on other lead sources, call San Francisco Department of Public Health Children's Environmental Health Promotion at (415) 252-3839.

For a *free* lead-in-water test, you must be eligible for WIC and get a completed voucher issued by a WIC office in San Francisco. Families who are not eligible for WIC benefits may arrange for a lead-in-water test with SF-PUC Water Quality Division for \$25.00 per tap.