

Renfrew County and District Health Unit
Lead Health Messages
May 2007

What should I do if I live in a house with lead service lines?

- Run the water from the drinking water tap if it has been sitting in the pipes for 6 hours or more. Water should be flushed for at least five minutes.
- Use cold, flushed water for drinking and preparing food. Water from the hot water tap should not be consumed as it may contain more lead.
- If there are children under the age of 6 or pregnant women living in the house, follow the recommendations listed below.
- Contact your municipality to discuss replacing the lead service lines to your house and replacement of lead service lines on city property.

What should households with children under the age of 6 years and pregnant women do if they have lead service lines?

Children under the age of 6 and pregnant women should drink bottled water or use an approved filter attached to the tap or an approved water-pitcher filtration system. Make sure any filtration product purchased is certified as meeting the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) International standard for reducing lead. **This recommendation is particularly important for infants whose formula is prepared by adding tap water to liquid concentrate or powder.**

When using filtration devices it is very important to follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully. When using a filter device be sure that:

- The water is free of bacteria. This is certain to be the case when using a municipal water supply.
- The water is flushed for at least 30 seconds if the filter is on the tap.
- The filter is changed at the times recommended by the manufacturer.

The label on bottled water should be checked to ensure it is lead-free. Lead content is listed on the "Analysis Label" and is also referred to as "Pb". The water is lead-free if the value for lead is zero. It is important to note that not all bottled water is lead-free.

When making formula with any water, including filtered or bottled water, it is important to bring the water to a hard rolling boil for two minutes and cool before mixing with the formula. This follows the usual recommendations for preparing formula for infants under four months.

If your water has been shown to have lead levels below the recommended 10 micrograms/L, continue to flush your water for at least 5 minutes before use, as recommended above. Filters and bottled waters are no longer needed. However, if you still have concerns, contact the Renfrew County and District Health Unit at (613) 735-8654 Ext.555

Why are particular recommendations being made for children less than 6 years of age and pregnant women?

- **Children less than 6 years of age:** Younger children are still developing and are therefore more sensitive to the neurologic and blood effects of lead. As well, children less than 6 years of age absorb lead more easily than adults. Particular recommendations are made for formula-fed infants because the water used to make the formula can contribute 40 – 60% of an infant's lead intake, whereas drinking water in older children and adults only contributes approximately 10% of total lead intake.
- **Pregnant women:** Pregnant women can pass lead in their blood to their fetus during pregnancy. Therefore particular recommendations are made to keep lead levels in pregnant women as low as possible.

What should those who have lead service lines do if they have only older children and non-pregnant women in the house?

- Run the water from the drinking water tap if it has been sitting in the pipes for 6 hours or more. Water should be flushed for at least five minutes.
- Use cold, flushed water for drinking and preparing food. Water from the hot water tap should not be consumed as it may contain more lead.
- Contact your municipal office to discuss replacing the lead service lines to your house and replacement of lead service lines on city property.

Do breastfeeding mothers need to use filtered water or bottled water if they have lead service lines?

No. The amount of lead found in the breast milk of women who drink tap water in homes served by lead service lines does not constitute a risk to their infants' health. Breastfeeding mothers should follow the recommendations outlined above, as for non-pregnant women.

Do older children and non-pregnant women need to use filtered water or bottled water if they have lead service lines?

Generally the answer is no. Older children and non-pregnant women usually get only a small percentage of their lead from water. Most lead exposure comes from food, and in young children, lead exposure can also come from eating dirt and dust from the environment. Standards for lead in water have been lowered significantly over the years. Levels slightly over the acceptable levels of 10 micrograms/L are very unlikely to cause health effects for older children and non-pregnant women.

What if my child has been drinking water from the tap and we have lead service lines? Should I be concerned?

No. Over the years, the major sources of lead exposure for children have decreased significantly because of the elimination of lead in gasoline, paint and solder in tin cans. Other jurisdictions have similar lead issues in their drinking water systems. In some areas where lead toxicity is reportable to public health, significantly elevated blood lead levels have not been reported. Lead toxicity is not reportable to public health in Ontario. However, local testing for lead levels in blood has not revealed any concerns related to lead in drinking water. Parents are advised to discuss specific health concerns with their physicians.

If I have lead service lines, can I use the water for bathing, showering, and washing dishes and clothes?

Yes. Activities such as bathing, showering and washing dishes and clothes do not expose people in the house to lead.

What about lead in sources other than drinking water?

Except in formula-fed infants, drinking water normally contributes only a small percentage of total lead intake. Lead in other sources has been significantly reduced by the elimination of lead in gasoline, paint and solder in tin cans. In older houses, lead-based paints may remain a source of lead exposure, particularly to children who may eat lead-based paint chips or dust. Measures to reduce lead exposure in the home can be found at www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/maho/yohoyohe/inaiqu/inaiqu_007.cfm

If I do not have lead services lines in my home, do I need to be concerned?

No. Municipally supplied water has very low levels of lead, well below the acceptable standards. Concerns have only been raised with regard to lead service lines in homes built before 1952.