



Lead Testing in Schools & Child Care Centers FAQ

In June, Governor Polis signed into law Colorado House Bill 22-1358: Clean Water in Schools and Child Care Centers. This bill requires all licensed child care programs and schools serving grades preschool-fifth to test their drinking water for lead and take action when results are found above the action level. This testing program is being implemented by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) as the [Test and Fix Water for Kids Program](#). The goal of this program is to lower children's exposure to lead. To meet these requirements, many Routt County schools and child care centers are participating in the [Voluntary EPA Lead Testing Program](#) with Routt County Public and Environmental Health and CDPHE and have tested all water sources for lead where children and staff get water for drinking and cooking. Testing results and the status of mitigation efforts are available on the [CDPHE website](#).

Routt County Public Health is providing the following FAQ document regarding the recent lead testing conducted in schools. We hope this document will provide answers to questions you may have regarding the results of the recent testing and what to do if you are concerned about potential health effects of lead exposure.

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What causes lead contamination in drinking water?

Lead is a naturally occurring metal which has been used in a wide variety of products including drinking water service lines and plumbing materials. Service lines are the pipes that bring water from the provider to your house. Lead service lines were common in the U.S. until the mid 1950s. The Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974 intended to protect the quality of drinking water and ultimately banned the use of lead in pipes, solder and other plumbing materials in 1986. However, lead plumbing that was installed previously still exists. Lead in drinking water typically occurs because these lead-containing pipes and plumbing materials corrode over time. Older fixtures including faucets and drinking fountains may also be sources of lead in drinking water. The goal of the program is to test these fixtures and replace any that contain lead with lead-free options.

EPA Sources of Lead in Drinking Water infographic:
[epa lead in drinking water final 8.21.17.pdf](#)

What are other potential sources of lead in the environment?

Lead is a toxic metal that is especially harmful to young children. The degree of risk depends on the child's total exposure to lead from all environmental sources – air, soil, dust, food, paint, consumer products, and water:

- Homes built before 1978 (when lead-based paints were banned) probably contain lead-based paint. When the paint peels and cracks, it makes lead dust. People can be exposed to lead when they swallow or breathe in lead dust.
- Old or corroded lead plumbing or old brass fixtures can contribute to increased lead levels in drinking water.
- Lead can be found in some products such as toys and jewelry.
- Lead is sometimes in candies, cosmetics or traditional home remedies.
- Certain jobs and hobbies involve working with lead-based products, like stain glass work, and may cause parents to bring lead into the home.
- Eating game meat harvested with lead bullets can increase the risk of lead poisoning. This is why hunters should use only lead-free ammunition when hunting.
- People who use indoor shooting ranges, who cast bullets and reload their own ammunition are at risk for lead exposure.
- People who live near airports may be exposed to lead in air and soil from aviation gas used in piston engine aircrafts.
- Workers in industries such as construction, mining, welding and plumbing may have occupational exposures to lead.

CDPHE has created this document titled [Learning about lead in your drinking water](#) for more information about lead in drinking water.

Why is 5 ppb the threshold for acceptable levels of lead in water?

House Bill 22-1358 has set a new and more stringent standard of acceptable lead in drinking water at schools and child care centers at 5 parts per billion (ppb). This is lower than the current federal level of 15 parts per billion (ppb).

Setting these levels helps to determine the corrective actions needed after water sampling. If lead is detected in concentrations less than 5 ppb, CDPHE recommends periodic flushing after long periods of low or no usage (weekends and breaks). Samples with concentrations equal to or greater than 5 ppb require immediate action to shut the source off from use until the best fix can be determined. Upon determination of the source of lead, the fixture can either be replaced with lead-free options, filters, or the permanent removal of that fixture from use. The overall goal of this program is to proactively identify problem areas and take the appropriate actions to correct them.

Why would some faucets have different levels of lead than others in the same building?

The program guidelines require entities to test each fixture used for drinking or cooking. This is because older faucets and drinking water fountains can contain lead. Most buildings have a variety of fixtures throughout the building, and some may contain lead while others may not. In addition, fixtures that are used less often are more likely to have corrosion, which is why older fixtures rarely used can return higher lead levels. The great news is that we not only identify fixtures containing lead in this program, but we also are able to determine which fixtures do not contain lead and are safe for drinking water consumption.

The program uses the sampling methods established by the EPA to determine the source of lead. An initial first-draw sample represents water in contact with the fixture and upstream plumbing. A secondary flush sample represents water in contact with the interior plumbing. If lead is in the first-draw sample, but not in the flush sample, the fixture is the likely source. If lead is in both samples, the source likely is in pipes further upstream from the fixture. It is important to note that the initial results represent a first-use sample of water at the beginning of the day to understand the lead levels of water that have been sitting in the plumbing overnight.

Why aren't all water sources in the school buildings being tested?

Only water sources used for consumption such as drinking fountains and sources used for food preparation were tested for this program. Handwashing does not create significant exposure to lead because skin does not absorb lead in water.

What does the health department recommend if community members are concerned about potential health effects?

Routt County Public Health encourages community members concerned about their health to talk to their physician. The toxicity of any substance depends on a variety of individual factors, including how much of the substance a person is exposed to, how they are exposed, and for how long. [A lead risk questionnaire](#) is available to help evaluate the degree of exposure risk.

Children under the age of 3 and pregnant people are at the highest risk of health impacts from lead exposure. Lead can build up in the body over a lifetime, so ongoing exposure, even at low levels, may eventually cause health effects. Lead exposure in babies and young children can affect their rapid growth and development. All Medicaid-eligible children are required to receive a lead test at 12 and 24 months old.