Questions About Lead and Water

What is lead and how are we exposed to it?

Lead is a common, naturally occurring metal found throughout the environment. Lead is not found in Lake Michigan surface water or in our source of supply water treated by Milwaukee Water Works. Lead enters drinking water primarily as a result of corrosion or the wearing away of materials in the water distribution system and household plumbing that contain lead. Despite concerns about drinking water, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes that "the greatest exposure to lead is swallowing or breathing in lead paint chips or dust."

Is exposure to lead a health concern?

Please contact the City of Wauwatosa Health Department Referral Nurse Line at (414) 479-8939.

Who is responsible for the water service lateral to my property?

The Wauwatosa Water Utility maintains the water service lateral pipe from the water main up to and including the shut off valve outside of the property called the curb stop. The property owner owns the water service lateral after the curb stop to the property and all plumbing inside of the property except for the water meter. A licensed plumber may be able to assist in determining your property's plumbing conditions as well as the costs associated with a service lateral replacement.

How do I know if my property has a lead water supply line?

The federal government banned the use of leaded pipe and solder in new plumbing systems in 1986. If your property was built before 1986, your water service lateral and plumbing system may contain lead. You may call the Wauwatosa Water Utility at (414) 471-8480 to find out more information about your service line pipe material.

What can I do to reduce lead in my tap water?

If you're concerned about lead in your drinking water, you can take several steps to limit possible exposure.

- Flush your tap water. Flushing the tap is particularly important when the faucet has been unused for an extended period of time. It takes time for lead to leach into water, so the first water drawn from the tap after a long period of non-use may contain higher levels of lead. Flushing clears standing water from your plumbing and home service line to ensure you are getting drinking water from the water main, where lead is rarely present. Let the cold water run from the tap until it is noticeably colder (this may take up to two minutes or more) before using it for cooking or drinking.

Remember, you must flush EACH drinking water faucet after long periods of non-use for this strategy to be effective.

CONSERVATION TIP: Use flushed water for non-potable purposes such as watering plants or washing dishes.

- Use only cold water for cooking or drinking. Lead leaches more easily into hot water than cold water.
- Boiling water DOES NOT remove lead.
- Remove faucet strainers and rinse them to remove any debris. This can be done periodically to remove accumulated debris as well.

What is the Wauwatosa Water Utility doing to replace lead services?

As a standard practice with our water main replacement projects the Wauwatosa Water Utility replaces old lead water service laterals with new HDPE plastic materials from the water main to the curb stop.

Filters Certified to Reduce Lead

Water filters used for reducing lead in drinking water must be certified for lead reduction in accordance with NSF/ANSI Standard 53 – Drinking Water Treatment Unit Standard for Health Effects.

Types of water filters.

- Pour-through pitcher/container: Water drips through a filter into a water pitcher/container using gravity.
- Faucet mount: Mounts on kitchen faucet. Uses diverter to direct water through a filter.
- Direct plumbing to a separate tap or to kitchen sink: Installs under a sink; filtered water is usually dispensed through a separate faucet directly to the kitchen sink.
- Refrigerator filter: Installed in your refrigerator and typically dispensed through the refrigerator door.

Water Testing

You can't see, smell or taste lead in your water. Testing at the tap is the only way to measure the lead levels in your home or workplace. If you choose to have your tap water tested be sure to use a private laboratory certified by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Below are three examples of certified labs.

Suburban Laboratories	Northern Lakes Services, Inc.	State Lab of Hygiene
10520 N Baehr Rd J	2420 N Grandview Blvd.	2601 Agriculture Drive
Mequon, WI 53092	Waukesha, WI 53188	Madison, WI 53707
Phone: (920) 459-2500	Phone: (262) 547-3406	Phone: (800) 442-4618

Where can I get more information?

EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline: 1-800-426-4791

National Lead Information Center: 1-800-424-5323

American Water Works Association:

- www.awwa.org
- https://drinktap.org/Water-Info/Whats-in-My-Water/Lead-In-Water