

Lead Testing - Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are we testing school drinking water for lead?

In recent months, there have been several local and national news stories about high lead levels in school drinking water. Lead isn't present in the water that The Board of Water Works of Pueblo (Pueblo Water) provides to our community and schools, but lead can get into water as it moves through lead-containing plumbing and fixtures. While there is not a state or federal mandate requiring schools to test for lead at this time, we are working collaboratively with Pueblo Water to implement proactive measures to test drinking water sources for our students and staff to ensure it meets federal drinking water guidelines established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

2. When will the testing take place?

Pueblo Water has volunteered to perform the tests for lead in accordance with EPA guidelines at no cost to Pueblo City Schools (PCS). This testing will be performed in as timely a fashion as is feasible, but will be an addition to the normal work load in the Pueblo Water laboratory. As a result, there is no fixed time frame for completion of the testing other than that it will be completed as soon as is practically possible. Sampling has already begun, and will continue, site after site, until all schools' drinking water has been tested.

3. How is lead measured?

Our Facilities Department employees have been trained by Pueblo Water staff and will be visiting schools to collect a water sample from every drinking fountain, kitchen food prep sink, lounge sink or other potable fixtures used for ingesting water. All water samples collected from the schools will be tested by Pueblo Water's laboratory personnel. The EPA recommends that fixtures providing water with lead levels over 20 parts per billion be remediated or disabled in schools. As a precaution, Pueblo City Schools will identify and remediate fixtures that are 15 parts per billion or higher. *One part per billion is equivalent to a single drop of water in 55,000 gallons.*

4. How does lead get in the water?

Lead normally enters the drinking water from service lines, solder in copper piping and brass faucet fixtures. Lead is not present in the drinking water that Pueblo Water sends to our schools. Until a few decades ago, lead pipes were widely used for service lines and connections that carry water from street mains to houses and schools. Lead-based solder was used to join standard copper water pipes until 1988, when lead solder was outlawed. Until recently, brass and bronze faucets could legally contain up to 8% lead. The new "no-lead" requirements lowered the maximum content of lead allowed in plumbing products that come into contact with drinking water (pipes, pipe fittings, plumbing fixtures and more) from 8% to 0.25%. Products with the higher levels could be sold until January 2014.

5. What action will the district take if lead is found?

Any source testing at or above 15 parts per billion will be taken out of service immediately, and an action plan put in place to filter, replace or disable the fixture. The school will be notified and the district remediation protocols will be initiated. The source will not be used for drinking until tests come back below 15 parts per billion.

6. Why is lead a concern?

Lead exposure over long periods of time can cause health risks. While water is not the primary source of lead exposure among children, it is still a priority with Pueblo City Schools to ensure all of our schools are meeting the recommendations set by the EPA. The safety of our students and staff is our number one priority.

7. How will Pueblo City Schools communicate testing results?

Results for each individual school will be sent to the school as they become available. Lead results will also be posted on the Pueblo City Schools website at www.PuebloCitySchools.us

8. Does Pueblo City Schools expect to find lead in schools' drinking water?

While we don't have evidence of elevated lead in drinking water at this time, we do have a number of older schools. This makes it more likely we will have lead levels close to or above the EPA recommendations. If so, we will inform our families and staff and move quickly to remediate the issue.

9. How can I learn more about lead exposure?

Resources are available from the EPA and the Pueblo County Health Department. You may also consult with your child's health care provider.

10. Is Pueblo City Schools the only Colorado district undertaking this kind of testing?

No. As an example, Denver Public Schools, Jefferson County and several other school districts are also testing for lead in their water.

11. How can I get more information about this testing?

You may contact the Director of Communications formation at 719-549-7187, or via email at Dalton.sprouse@pueblocitieschools.es.