

Lead and Copper Frequently Asked Questions

QUESTION: What is lead?

ANSWER: Lead is a naturally occurring metal that is harmful if inhaled or swallowed. Lead can be found in air, soil, dust, food, and water.

QUESTION: Does the District test for lead contamination?

ANSWER: By way of background, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set an Action Level for lead at 15 micrograms per liter (or parts per billion). At least 90 percent of samples taken (the 90th percentile) must be less than 15 micrograms per liter. [The Action Level for copper is 1.3 milligrams per liter (or parts per million)].

The Scotts Valley Water District tests for lead quarterly in source water pumped from wells and treated water as it leaves the treatment plants. Our samples are always negative for lead. Since 1993, the District also regularly has tested the water at a selected number of higher-risk homes and has never exceeded the Action Level. These homes were constructed using copper pipes with lead solder prior to the 1986 federal ban on lead solder. Our monitoring is conducted in accordance with regulatory requirements and guidance.

The 90th percentile results of the District's most recent monitoring (2014) were well below the Action Levels. The 90th percentile lead was not detected at or above the State of California detection level (5 micrograms per liter). The 90th percentile copper concentration was 2 mg/L. A total of 20 homes were tested. Lead was not detected above the State detection level in any of the 20 samples, and none of the copper concentrations from the 20 homes were above the Action Level.

If the Action Level is exceeded, water utilities are required to notify all of its customers and provide instructions on what to do to limit lead exposure as required by the EPA. In addition, the EPA requires water systems to control the corrosiveness of their water if the level of lead at home taps exceeds the Action Level.

QUESTION: How can I be exposed to lead?

ANSWER: The most common source of lead exposure is from paint in homes and buildings built before 1978. Lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust are the main sources of exposure for lead in U.S. children. Lead-based paints were banned for use in housing in 1978.

Although the main sources of exposure to lead are ingesting paint chips and inhaling dust, lead also can be found in some household plumbing materials and some water service lines. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 10-20 percent of human exposure to lead may come from lead in drinking water.

QUESTION: What are the risks of lead exposure?

ANSWER: Lead can cause a variety of adverse health effects when people are exposed. These effects may include increases in blood pressure for adults; delays in normal physical and mental development in babies and young children; and deficits in the attention span, hearing, and learning abilities of children.

QUESTION: How does lead get into drinking water?

ANSWER: Lead is rarely found to naturally exist in water supply sources, like surface water or groundwater. More commonly, lead leaches into water over time through corrosion—a dissolving or wearing away of metal caused by a chemical reaction between water and your plumbing. Lead can leach into water from pipes, solder, fixtures, faucets (brass) and fittings. Lead service lines and pipes have not been found to be used in construction in the Scotts Valley Water District. Therefore, sources of lead in our drinking water are primarily limited to lead-based solder and fixtures located at residential and commercial sites where water is received. The amount of lead in your water depends on the types and amounts of minerals in the water, how long the water stays in the pipes, the water's corrosivity, and water temperature.

QUESTION: What are the regulations related to lead in drinking water?

ANSWER: Regulatory measures taken during the last two decades have greatly reduced human exposure to lead in drinking water.

- In 1974, Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act. This law requires the EPA to determine the level of contaminants in drinking water at which no adverse health effects are likely to occur with an adequate margin of safety.
- In 1991, the EPA published a regulation to control lead and copper in drinking water. This regulation is known as the Lead and Copper Rule. The EPA revised the regulation in 2000 and 2007.
- Limits on the amount of lead that can be used in plumbing products have also been set. These requirements were first enacted federally in 1986 and then reduced to even lower levels by California in 2006.

QUESTION: I'm concerned my home may have lead in its plumbing. How can I find out?

ANSWER: If you're concerned your home plumbing may contain lead in its pipes or fittings, you may want to have your water tested by a state-certified laboratory. Testing is the only way to confirm if lead is present or absent. For more information on testing your water, contact a drinking water laboratory. Here are three in our area:

Soil Control Lab, Watsonville, (831) 724-5422

Monterey Bay Analytical Services, Monterey, (831) 375-MBAS (6227)

Bolsa Analytical Lab, Hollister, (831) 637-4590

QUESTION: How can I reduce exposure to lead in my drinking water?

ANSWER: There are steps you can take to reduce your exposure to lead in drinking water:

- Run your water to flush out lead. If it hasn't been used for several hours, run the water for three to five minutes to clear most of the lead from the water. To conserve water, remember to catch the flushed tap water for plants, cleaning or flushing toilets.
- Always use cold water for drinking, cooking, and preparing baby formula. Never cook with or drink water from the hot water tap. Never use water from the hot water tap to make baby formula.
- Do not boil water to remove lead. Boiling water will not reduce lead.
- Periodically remove and clean the faucet screen/aerator. While removed, run the water to eliminate debris.
- You may consider investing in a point-of-use home water treatment device. When purchasing a water treatment device, make sure it is certified under NSF/ANSI 53 to remove lead. You can check to see if the device is registered for sale in California [HERE](#).
- Identify and replace plumbing fixtures containing lead. Brass faucets, fittings and valves may leach lead into drinking water. Products sold in California after the 2010 law went into effect must contain very low levels of lead.
- Have a licensed electrician check your wiring. Your home electrical system may be attached to your service line or elsewhere in your plumbing. If this connection is electrified, it can accelerate corrosion. Check with a licensed electrician to correct ground faults and evaluate your local electric code to determine if your wiring can be grounded elsewhere. **DO NOT** attempt to change the wiring yourself because improper bonding or grounding can cause electrical shock and fire hazards.

QUESTION: Should I test my children for exposure to lead?

ANSWER: Children at risk of exposure to lead should be tested. Your doctor can perform a simple blood test to determine your child's blood-lead level.

QUESTION: Where can I get additional information?

ANSWER: Read the District's annual Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) that contains the results of hundreds of water quality tests conducted, as well as other quality information [HERE](#).
 County of Santa Cruz Public Health's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program: (831) 454-4432 (or visit the website [HERE](#))
 National Lead Information Center: (800) 424-LEAD (or visit the website [HERE](#))