

## Lead and Copper in Drinking Water Frequently Asked Questions

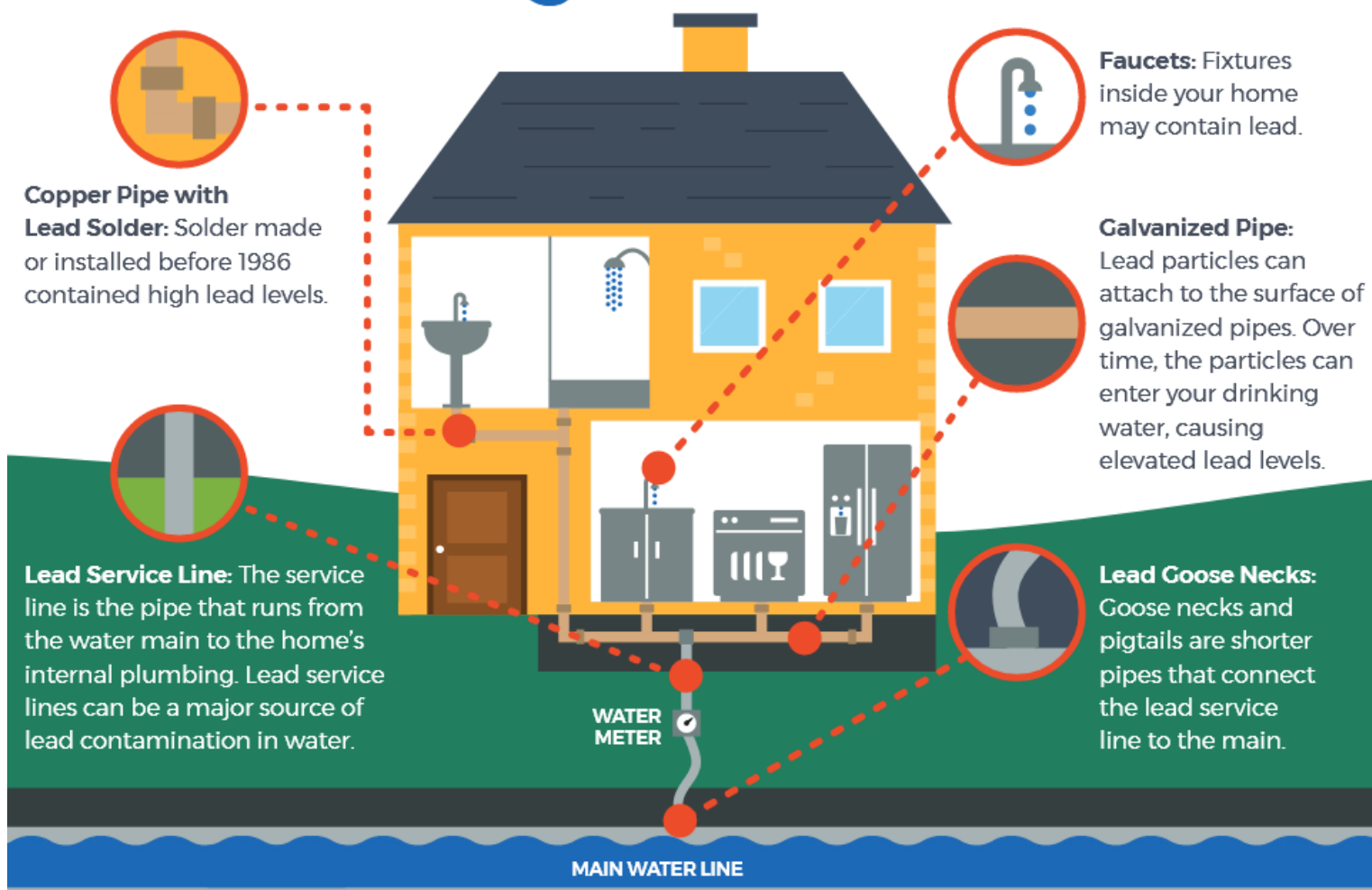
**Q:** How does lead get into drinking water?

**A:** Lead can enter drinking water when it comes into contact with pipes, solder, plumbing, fittings and fixtures that contain lead. Water leaving the water plant does not contain lead.

**Q:** What plumbing materials have lead?

**A:** Plumbing products such as service lines, pipes and fixtures can contain lead. Solder (the metal used to join two pieces of pipe) can have lead. Because of legislation in 1986 and 2014, newer materials contain less lead than older plumbing materials and fixtures. The infographic below, developed by the EPA, demonstrates where sources of lead could be in your home

# Sources of LEAD in Drinking Water

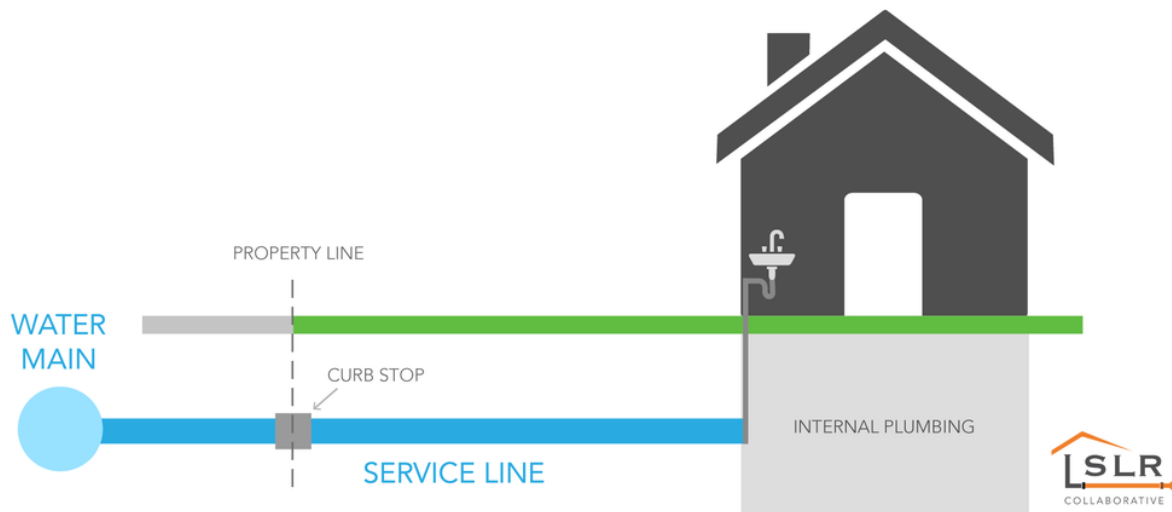


**Q: What is a fixture?**

A: A fixture is another name for a faucet, like the faucet in a kitchen or bathroom. Older fixtures can contain lead. Fixtures purchased in 2014 or newer can only have 0.25% lead. Older fixtures can contain up to 8% or more lead based on how old they are.

**Q: What is a service line?**

A: A service line is a piece of pipe that connects the city's water main under the street to your home. This connection delivers water to your home. In older homes (built before the 1950's) this connection can be a lead pipe. If you have a service line that is made of lead, you have an increased risk of having elevated levels of lead in your drinking water.



**Q: I'm not sure if I have a lead service line. What should I do?**

A: If you do not know what your service line material is and are interested in having your home inspected, please contact your water supplier and they should be able to help you figure out what type of service you have.

Or...

- 1) You can hire a licensed plumber to inspect the plumbing in your home, or
- 2) You can look at the plumbing where it enters your home yourself. Look for things like pipe color (copper-colored or grey) and whether a magnet sticks to your plumbing. Copper plumbing will be reddish in color. Grey pipe that a magnet sticks to is likely galvanized. Grey pipe that a magnet will not stick to is likely lead.

**Q: What is being done about the lead service lines in the water system?**

A: The communities in the Bay Area Water System that have lead service lines are working on plans to identify, remove, and replace every lead service line in their system. For more information, contact your water utility.

**Q: Is there any lead in the water coming from the water plant?**

A: Testing as recently as June 10, 2019 has shown that there is no lead in the water leaving the Bay Area Water Treatment Plant

**Q: What is the water plant doing to reduce the risk of lead and copper leaching into tap water?**

A: The Bay Area Water Treatment Plant adds orthophosphate in the form of Phosphoric Acid to water for corrosion control. Orthophosphate reacts with lead to form compounds that have a strong tendency to stay in solid form and not dissolve into water. Orthophosphate is used by water systems throughout the country and is one of the leading corrosion control methods used by water supplies. Research, corrosion studies, and testing by plant staff have all suggested that feeding orthophosphate has helped control lead levels in our system. Unfortunately, as long as lead components are in contact with the water, the risk of lead dissolving into the water will exist.

**Q: How can I reduce my exposure to lead from drinking water?**

A: Lead enters drinking water when it comes in contact with individual homes that have lead service lines or internal plumbing made with lead. The most important thing you can do is run your water before you take a drink.

The more time water has been sitting in your home's pipes, the more lead it may contain. Therefore, if your water has not been used for several hours, run the water before using it for drinking or cooking. This flushes lead-containing water from the pipes.

Additional flushing may be required for homes that have been vacant or have a longer service line.

- If you **do not** have a lead service line, run the water for 30 seconds to two minutes, or until it becomes cold or reaches a steady temperature.
- If you **do** have a lead service line, run the water for at least five minutes to flush water from your home of building's plumbing and the lead service line.
- Use cold tap water for drinking and cooking.
- Use cold tap water for preparing baby formula. If you have a lead service line, consider using bottled water or a lead reducing filter to prepare baby formula.
- Do not boil your water. Boiling will not reduce the amount of lead in water.
- Consider using a filter to reduce lead. Look for NSF 42 and 53 certified filters.
- Get your child tested. Call The Bay County Health Department at 989-895-4006 or your family doctor.
- Get your drinking water tested. Call your local water utility or the Bay County Health Department at 989-895-4006 for more information.
- Check if you have a lead service line or plumbing or fixtures that contain lead. Call your local water utility for more information.

**Q: Doesn't flushing waste a lot of water?**

A: Running your water to flush out lead does not mean you need to let the water run down the drain. You can use your water by doing laundry, washing dishes, watering house plants, or using the shower or toilet to flush the lead-containing water from your service line.

**Q: I have children, should they be tested for lead exposure?**

A: If you have a lead service line, or have testing results that are over 15 ppb, you should have infants or children under the age of six tested. Please contact the Bay County Health Department at 989-895-4006, or your family doctor or pediatrician, for more information.

**Q: What health effects does lead have?**

A: Lead can cause serious health and development problems. The greatest risk of lead exposure is to infants, young children, and pregnant women. If you have questions regarding the health effects of lead, or to have your blood lead level tested, please contact the Bay County Health Department at 989-895-4006 or your family doctor for more information.

**Q: Where can I get my child's blood tested for lead?**

A: You should speak with your family doctor about blood lead level testing if you believe your child has been exposed to lead or is at risk of lead exposure.

**Q: What does an "elevated blood lead level" mean?**

In Michigan, a blood lead level (BLL) of five (5) micrograms per deciliter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ ) or higher is considered elevated. Most people who have an elevated blood lead level do not look or act sick. A blood lead test is the only way to determine a blood lead level. Talk with your doctor or the Bay County Health Department about getting a lead test for you or your child.

**Q: What is the EGLE's role in this?**

A: Any system that has exceeded the 15ppb federal action level for lead has been contacted by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy and is working with the department to take necessary actions to meet Lead and Copper Rule requirements. If you are interested in more information about the Lead and Copper Rule, please visit [EGLE's website](#).

**Q: What is an Action Level? What does an Action Level exceedance mean?**

A: An Action Level is a concentration of lead or copper that is not a health based standard, but a value that triggers investigative sampling of water quality (lead, copper, pH, alkalinity, calcium, conductivity, temperature, chloride and sulfate), educational outreach to customers, and an assessment of treatment options. A water supply exceeds the Action Level if the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of the samples exceeds 15 parts per billion (ppb).

**Q: What does 90<sup>th</sup> percentile mean?**

A: Basically, if more than 10% of the water samples collected test above the allowable limit of 15 parts per billion (ppb) for lead, then the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile is also above 15 ppb. A water system that exceeds the Action Level for lead must conduct investigative sampling of water quality, educational outreach to customers, and an assessment of treatment options.

**Q: Can I take my own water samples?**

A: Yes, but many samples have special requirements like hold times, thermal preservation and specific sampling methods. The State of Michigan has a list of certified labs on its website. [Laboratories Certified for Lead and Copper Testing](#)

Or you can contact the Bay County Health Department at 989-895-4006.

**Q: Are there other sources of lead in homes?**

A: Yes. Please contact the Bay County Health Department at 989-895-4006 for more information about other sources of lead such as paint and soil.

**Q: Do you have any information available in Spanish?**

A: Yes. EGLE has a flyer with steps you can take to reduce your exposure to lead in Spanish available at [https://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-odwma-water-cdwu-reduce-lead\\_524538\\_7.pdf](https://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-odwma-water-cdwu-reduce-lead_524538_7.pdf)

## Phone Numbers for Referrals

Service Line Questions

Contact your local water utility

Water Quality Questions

Bay Area Water Treatment Plant  
989-439-7245

Blood Testing Questions

Bay County Health Department  
989-895-4006

Safe Drinking Water Act Questions

Jeni Bolt, [boltj@michigan.gov](mailto:boltj@michigan.gov),  
517-331-5161

## Media Questions

Bay County Department of Water & Sewer

Bill Bohlen  
989-684-3883

State of Michigan

Scott Dean, [DeanS4@michigan.gov](mailto:DeanS4@michigan.gov)  
517-284-6700

## Other General Questions

General State of Michigan (EGLE) questions

1-800-662-9278

General State of Michigan (DHHS) questions

1-800-648-6942

General Bay Co Health Department questions

989-895-4006