

Lead



What is lead?

Lead is a natural metal found in soil, and rock. Lead has been used to make many products, and some of this lead can get into the air, the water, and even our bodies.

Can lead affect my health?

Yes. The health effects of lead are linked to how much and how often you take lead into your body: a small amount can affect you after a long time; or, a large amount can affect you after a short time.

Young children and the unborn are most affected by lead intake. High lead intake at an early age can harm a child's learning ability and behaviour, as well as cause hearing and growth problems.

The effects of lead intake over many years can include increased blood pressure, fewer blood cells, kidney problems, and poor sperm production for men.

If you think that you or your child has health problems from high lead intake, see your family doctor. Your doctor may want you or your child to have a blood test to find out how much lead is in your body.

Lead and drinking water

Small amounts of lead can get into drinking water from lead pipes or from brass fittings and faucets that contain lead solder. This is a greater problem in homes built before 1970 where lead pipes have been used. The amount of lead in the water goes up the longer the water sits in the pipes.

To reduce your intake of lead from drinking water you should:

- let your drinking water run for 2 or 3 minutes in the morning, or after being away from home for over a day.
- use water from the cold tap for drinking, cooking or making baby formula, as water from hot water tanks may have higher amounts of lead.

Does my town water contain lead?

Town water is tested for chemicals, such as lead, twice per year. To find out if there is any lead in your town drinking water, contact your town council or local service district committee member. You can also find the test results listed on the Department of Environment's water resources website at: www.gov.nl.ca/env/water

How can I get my private drinking water tested for lead?

If you would like to know how much lead is in your private drinking water, a test can be done at a private lab for a fee. Check the yellow pages under “Laboratories - Analytical & Testing” for the location of the lab nearest you.

If you need some help with the lab results, please call one of the offices listed below.

What about home water treatment units?

Some home water treatment units can remove lead from your drinking water, but they may be costly. If you decide to buy one, be sure that it is designed to remove lead and follow the instructions for changing the filters. See www.nsf.org for more information about home drinking water treatment units.

What other ways can I lower my lead intake?

Some other ways of lowering your family’s lead intake are:

- beware of children’s toys or furniture made before 1975, as they may have lead paint
- avoid using old paints made before 1976
- avoid removing old paint, unless it is chipped or flaking, when you do work on your home, as this will make more lead dust
- make sure that your children wash their hands before they eat
- wet mop floors to avoid stirring up dust which may contain lead
- wash objects that may be put in a child’s mouth
- use lead-free solder when making repairs, or doing hobbies
- keep vegetable gardens and children’s play areas away from busy roads and old buildings where more lead may be present
- shower and change your clothes after working with objects containing lead, like recycled car batteries
- only buy candles without a lead core wick

Where can I find out more?

If you have any questions about drinking water safety, please do not hesitate to contact the Government Service Centre or Regional Health Authority nearest you.



Department of Health and Community Services
Department of Environment and Conservation
Department of Government Services
Regional Health Authorities

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