



What You Need to Know About Lead In Tap Water

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority

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MWRA's source waters, the Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs, contain no lead.

MWRA water is lead-free when it leaves the **reservoirs**, and MWRA and local water mains do not add lead to the water. However, lead can get into water through a lead service line (the pipe that connects your home to the main in the street) or household plumbing.

This page will let you know how lead can get into tap water and how you can reduce potential exposure to lead in your home. It also includes **MWRA test results**, information about **how to get your household tap water tested for lead** and more resources.

Video: Easy Ways to Reduce Your Exposure to Lead in Drinking Water

[More on YouTube](#)

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[How Can Lead Get into My Water?](#)

Lead can leach into tap water if the **service line** that connects your home to the water mains in the street is made of lead. The pipes that carry water in the street are made of iron or steel, and do not add lead to your water. If you have concerns about your **service line**, you should **contact your local water department**.

What's Happening in Flint's Water System and How MWRA is Different (PDF) 02/09/16

Lead also can get into tap water if you have lead pipes in your home. Lead can also enter tap water from if you have lead solder or brass fixtures in your home. Corrosion or wearing away of lead-based materials can add lead to tap water, especially if water sits for a long time in the pipes before use.

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How to Reduce Potential Exposure to Lead

To reduce your potential exposure, you should always use fresh, cold, running water for drinking and cooking. You should always buy plumbing fixtures that have zero- or low-lead levels. Read the labels of any new plumbing fixtures closely. **Get your water tested**.

Here are more steps you can take:

- Be careful of places you may find lead in your home. Paint, soil, dust and some pottery may contain lead.
- Run tap water until after the water feels cold. Then fill a fresh pitcher with fresh water and place in the refrigerator for future use.
- Never use hot water from the faucet for drinking or cooking, especially when making baby formula or food for infants.
- Ask your **local water department** if there are **lead service lines** leading to your home.
- Call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (1-800-532-9571) for health information, or visit their **website**.
- Get your home's water tested **at a lab that is DEP Certified** to test household tap water for lead.

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How to Get Your Home's Tap Water Tested for Lead

The best way to find out if your household tap water contains lead is to get your water tested by a lab that is DEP Certified to test household tap water for lead. DEP Certified Labs reliably test water at an affordable cost. Mail-in and drop-off options are available. Visit our **DEP Certified Lab page** for a list of labs and helpful links.

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What MWRA is Doing to Lower Lead Levels at the Tap

MWRA has made the water less corrosive, thereby reducing the leaching of lead into drinking water. In 1996, MWRA began operating a facility in Marlborough where sodium carbonate and carbon dioxide are added to adjust the water's pH and buffering capacity. This change has made the water less likely to leach lead from the pipes.

Lead levels in found in sample tests of tap water have dropped significantly since this treatment change. Also, local water departments are working to decrease lead corrosion by replacing existing lead service lines.

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About Lead Service Lines

A service line is the pipe that connects your house to the water main in the street. Some service lines that run from older homes (usually those built before 1940) to the utility water main are made from lead. Over time, many of these older used service lines have been replaced, but your home could still have one.



Typical location of a residential water service line (1)

How to Tell if You Have a Lead Service Line

To determine if your home has a lead service line you (or your plumber) need to inspect the service line.



A lead pipe can be easily scratched with a key (2)



Lead service lines often have a "bulb" shaped connection (3)

Lead service lines are generally a dull gray color and are very soft. You can identify them easily by carefully scratching with a key. If the pipe is made of lead, the area you've scratched will turn a bright silver color. Do not use a knife or other sharp instrument and take care not to puncture a hole in the pipe.

Ownership of the lead service line is typically shared between homeowners and your local water department. The homeowner typically owns the section of the pipe that is under the homeowner's property.

**Lead Control Update for MWRA Communities:
Presentation Materials for the March 21,
2016 Community Lead Forum (PDF)**

There may be MWRA communities that have already eliminated their lead water service lines. Check with your local water department to find the status in your community.

Replacing Home Service Lines

When replacing lead service lines, it is best to replace the entire lead service line. The surest way to remove concerns about lead from lead service lines is to get all the lead out by removing the entire service line.

If a pregnant woman or child lives at your home, replacing the lead service line can be an important way to reduce the potential for lead exposure.

The actual cost of service line replacement reflects a number of factors including the length of the service line, the technique used to install the new service line, and the environment where the service line is located.

Please contact your local water department to learn more about options for lead service line replacement and any payment assistance possible.

For Boston residents, please contact BWSC at 617-989-7000 or visit the following links: **BWSC Lead Replacement Incentive Program (PDF)**, **BWSC Lead Service Map**.

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MWRA Test Results

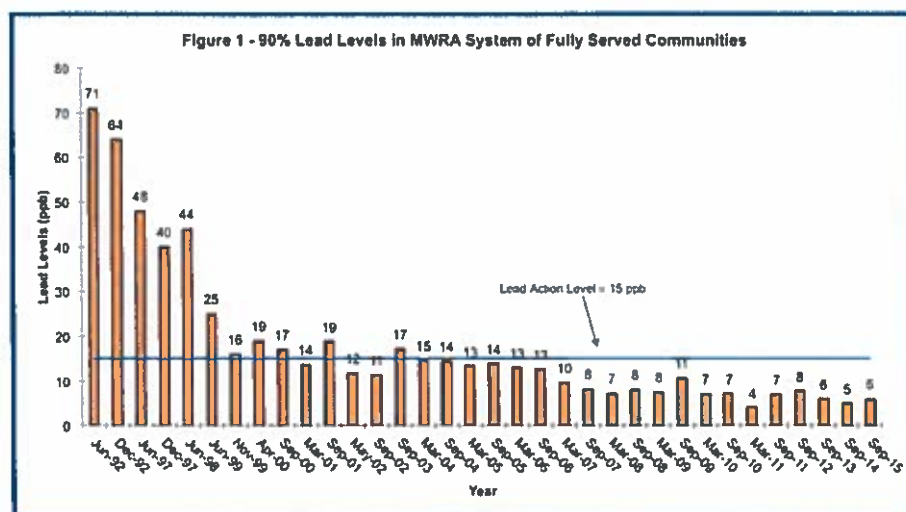
MWRA Meets Lead Standards

Under U.S. EPA rules, each year, MWRA and your local water department must test tap water in a sample of homes that are likely to have high lead levels. These are usually homes with lead service lines or lead solder. The EPA rule requires that 9 out of 10, or 90%, of the sampled homes must have lead levels below the Action Level of 15 parts per billion (ppb).

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Update on Lead and Copper Sampling

The most recent sampling round, once again, meets the Lead Action Level. Results from lead and copper samples collected in **September 2015** show that **97.5%** of the targeted high-risk homes had lead levels equal to or below the Lead Action Level (AL) of 15 parts per billion (ppb), meeting the requirement of at least 90%. The **90% value was 6.2 ppb**. MWRA, as a system, has met **20** straight rounds.



90% Lead Levels in MWRA System of Fully-Supplied Communities: Sept., 2015.

The most recent sampling round, once again, meets the Lead Action Level.

[Go to more details on lead sampling results](#)

Historical Data 1998-2015

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Important Information about the Health Risk of Lead from EPA

Infants and young children are typically more vulnerable to lead in drinking water than the general population. It is possible that lead levels in your home may be higher than levels in other homes in your community as a result of materials used in your home's plumbing. Infants and children who drink water containing lead in excess of the action level could experience delays in their physical or mental development. Children could show slight deficits in attention span and learning disabilities. Adults who drink this water over many years could develop kidney problems or high blood pressure. If you are concerned about lead levels in your home's water, you may wish to have your water **tested**. Flush the water until after the water is cold before you use it.

Helpful links:

[EPA Lead Information](#) | [CDC Lead Information](#)

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Should I Buy a Home Filtration System or Bottled Water?

For MWRA households, average water and sewer costs are approximately one cent per gallon. Most homes in the service area do not have lead issues with their tap water. Also, simply running your tap until the water is noticeably colder, after the water has been sitting for several hours, is usually a much cheaper and effective alternative to a filter or bottled water. Some water filtration systems do not remove lead. Before you purchase a filter, you should verify the manufacturer's claim. A good resource is the [National Sanitation Foundation](#) (1-877-867-3435). If your water has elevated levels of lead after flushing, bottled water is also an option, but it may cost as much as 1,000 times more than tap water.

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More MWRA Drinking Water Test Results

MWRA conducts hundreds of thousands of tests per year on over 120 contaminants.

[Monthly Test Results](#) | [Annual Test Results](#)

Related Pages on mwra.com

[Lead and Faucets Q&A](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions about MWRA Drinking Water](#)

[Testimony](#) provided to Congress by MWRA on behalf of the American Waterworks Association, 03/11/05 (PDF)

[MWRA Testimony on Lead](#) Before the Boston City Council Committee on Health and Human Services, 12/01/05

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More Resources

A public service announcement about lead in tap water from MWRA ([Video](#))

["Could There Be Lead in Your Tap Water?" Brochure](#) (PDF)

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Links

General Lead Information: [Mass. Department of Public Health Childhood Lead Prevention Program](#), (800) 532-9571

Water Filters: [National Sanitation Foundation](#), (800) NSF-8010

Mass. State Regulations: [Department of Environmental Protection Division of Water Supply](#), (617) 292-5770

[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Lead Information](#)

[Centers for Disease Control Lead Information](#)

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Contact Us

If you have questions or would like more information about lead in drinking water, please call our Water Quality Hotline: 617-242-5323, or email **Joshua Das**, Project Manager, Public Health.

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Image Credits

(1) Water service line illustration courtesy **American Waterworks Association**

(2, 3) Lead service line photos courtesy **EPA Region 5**

Updated March 29, 2016