



Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

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Robert J. Knodell
Acting Director



Michael L. Parson
Governor

July 26, 2021

Dear Missouri School Superintendents/Day Cares and Head Start Directors:

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) is committed to addressing lead in drinking water in schools and child care facilities, and overall reduction of childhood lead exposure. DHSS and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) are sending this letter as a reminder of our recommendation to school administrators of simple preventative practices to reduce potential lead exposures to students and staff at your facilities by flushing taps and drinking water fountains that have not been in use for an extended time.

Lead has been historically used in a variety of ways including in paints, gasoline, batteries, bullets, keys, and some vinyl products such as mini-blinds. Lead-based paint and lead contaminated dust are the most common sources of lead exposure. However, lead can also be found in drinking water. Materials like pipes and fixtures that contain lead can corrode over time. Lead is a toxic heavy metal that is harmful if inhaled or swallowed.

Lead is particularly dangerous for children. Even low blood lead levels in children are associated with poor academic achievement and higher rates of neurobehavioral disorders such as hyperactivity and attention deficits. No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Because the developmental effects of lead toxicity may be permanent, prevention of lead exposure is key to assuring our children have the best chance at success.

Children can be protected from lead by reducing or eliminating dangerous lead sources before exposure. To minimize the potential for students, and staff, being exposed to lead in drinking water, DHSS and DNR recommends implementing these preventative steps:

- If water sources for drinking or cooking have gone unused for two (2) or more days, flush the lines for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Make it a standard practice to run water sources used for cooking and drinking for 15 to 30 seconds, or until the water becomes cold and reaches a steady temperature, especially if the water has not been used for several hours.
- Use the cold water tap for drinking and cooking because hot water lines may contain more lead than cold water lines.

With funding from the Environmental Protection Agency, DHSS is implementing the Lead Testing in School and Childcare Program Drinking Water (Water Infrastructure Improvement for the Nation-WIIN Grant): <https://health.mo.gov/living/environment/wiin-grant/>. Priority is given to facilities in low income areas, elementary schools with at least 50% of the children receiving free and reduced lunches, Head Start child care programs (e.g. primarily care for children 6 years and under) and older facilities that are more likely to contain lead plumbing (e.g. facilities built before Missouri's lead ban of 1988).

DHSS is utilizing the Environmental Protection Agency's 3 Ts Guidance to implement the initiative. This includes efforts to **Communicate** the results and important lead information to the public, parents, teachers, and larger community throughout the implementation of the initiative (1) **Train** on the risks of lead in drinking water and the importance of testing for lead, as well as developing key partnerships to support the program; (2) **Test** using appropriate testing protocols and a certified laboratory; (3) **Take Action**, including the development of a

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MEMORANDUM

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plan for responding to results of the testing conducted. Guidance is available from DHSS on remediation of elevated lead levels.

Primary prevention is the main focus of reducing lead poisoning for both children and adults. Please contact the WIIN Grant Program at healthydrinkingwater@health.mo.gov or (573) 751-6102 if you have further questions about the health effects of lead, lead poisoning prevention tips, or testing your water for lead.

If you have questions about the drinking water supplied to your facilities, contact your public water system or the Department of Natural Resources' Public Drinking Water Branch at (573) 751-1300.

Sincerely,



Jeff Wenzel
Chief
Bureau of Environmental Epidemiology
Department of Health & Senior Services



David Lamb
Chief
Public Drinking Water Branch
Department of Natural Resources

JW:mp