

What is lead?

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

How can I be exposed to lead?

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 estimates that 10 to 20 percent of human exposure to lead may come from lead in drinking water. Infants who consume mostly mixed formula can receive 40 to 60 percent of their exposure to lead from drinking water.

How does lead get into my drinking water?

Lead is rarely found naturally in our source water or in the treated water flowing through the distribution system. 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. 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 corrosiveness, and water temperature.

Is my home at risk for lead plumbing?

The EPA defines high-risk homes as follows:

- Homes with a lead service line that connects the water main (located under the street) to your home's internal plumbing.
- Homes with copper pipe and lead solder built after 1982 and before 1988.
- Homes with lead pipes.

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

There are many 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.
- **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 formula.
- **Periodically remove and clean the faucet screen/aerator.** While removed, run the water to eliminate debris.