

## Frequently Asked Questions

# Water Testing for Lead in DC Public Schools

- 1. What's the process for testing water and who is involved in monitoring and labeling water sources, etc.?**
  - The Department of General Services (DGS) hires a contractor who employs an Industrial Hygienist (IH) that holds a Certified Drinking Water Sampler Certificate to perform the testing.
  - The IH visits the school the day before collection to coordinate with the school's custodian to ensure early-morning entry and identification of drinking water devices.
  - Two 250-milliliter (ml) water samples are collected from each device on school days before building occupants arrive to ensure that the water system has not been used at least eight (8) hours prior to testing.
  - The samples are delivered to a third-party lab for analysis with an average of five-business day turnaround.
  
- 2. What types of water sources are sampled?**
  - DGS is sampling all drinking fountains and coolers, classroom sinks, health suite sinks, staff break rooms, icemakers and kitchen sinks used for food preparation.
  
- 3. What is the process to remedy a water source found to contain a high level of lead?**
  - If a water source was found to contain an actionable level of lead, the device is turned off and tag is placed on the source to notify occupants to use the water device. A filter is installed and the water device will not be put back into circulation until the water source tests below the actionable level.
  - By actionable level, we are referring to a measurement of the lead in water in terms of parts per billion (ppb). The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) standard is 20 ppb for schools and to be even more cautious, DGS has decided that to take action for any water source testing above 1 ppb.
  
- 4. How will parents and community members learn about the water testing results?**
  - DGS will share the water testing results with DCPS, and DCPS in turn will share them with the school principal and families.
  - After the school community has been notified, the test results will be uploaded to the DGS website at this address: <http://dgs.dc.gov/page/water-sampling-results-district-schools>.
  
- 5. When a single water source is found to be above the actionable level, do you retest that source immediately after remediation or wait until the next round of testing?**
  - When a single source is found to be above the actionable level the drinking water source is turned off and DGS installs a new filter on the source. The new filter is retested prior to reactivating the drinking water source.

- 6. When a single water source is found to contain a high level of lead, do you retest other sources in the same building to ensure that it's just the one source?**
  - No, when a water source is tested and found to have an actionable amount of lead, the water source is remediated and re-tested, as described above. Other water sources that tested below an actionable level are not retested.
  
- 7. Are there any other environmental tests (e.g. mold, asbestos, pests, and ventilation system) performed at schools?**
  - Pests service monitoring and treatment are performed monthly.
  - Mold testing and remediation are done upon request on a case-by-case basis, usually when there is a concern for mold present.
  - Asbestos surveillance and inspections are performed per Federal Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) regulations.
  - Ventilation systems are checked annually.
  
- 8. Are the output filters replaced on a regularly scheduled basis? Is that tracked and verified? What's the oldest filter in our school and should it be replaced?**
  - Filters are replaced on an annual basis.
  - DGS has revised their tracking process and moving forward, will maintain a record that includes the date of filter replacements.
  
- 9. Is there a system-wide issue with lead in water in the schools?**
  - No, there is not a system-wide issue with lead in water in the schools.
  
- 10. Have any students tested positive for lead exposure?**
  - No students have been found to have elevated lead levels due to exposure from water in schools.
  
- 11. How does the blood lead screening work and what should children and parents expect?**
  - Each child will meet with a team of specialists including public health specialists from DOEE, a data manager and a phlebotomist.
  - Parents and guardians must be present.
  - After a data manager collects all necessary identification and student information, the phlebotomist will clean the child's hands with a disposable wet wipe to reduce the chance of sample contamination.
  - The phlebotomist will then conduct a single blood draw (finger-stick).
  - Once a blood sample is collected, the phlebotomist enters the blood specimen into an onsite analysis device, which provides results within two minutes.
  - Parents and guardians will be notified immediately and a formal letter from DOEE will be sent to each family.

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**12. Is the screening painful?**

- For most children, the screening is not very painful and the process is over before they realize it.
- DOEE staff has extensive experience working with young children, but if a child is overly anxious and cannot remain still, the phlebotomist will not conduct the screening.

**13. What happens if a child tests with elevated blood lead levels?**

- DOEE will provide the child's parent or guardian with an immediate consultation about the result.
- If the child is under the age of six (6), DOEE staff will immediately make arrangements to schedule a home visit by the agency's case management team and a certified lead risk assessor ---- to educate the family about the causes, risks, and consequences of lead exposure as well as what the family can do to reduce their child's risks.
- If a child is six (6) or older and has a blood lead level of more than five (5) micrograms per deciliter (the level at which the CDC recommends a public health intervention), DOEE will provide a home visit on a case-by-case basis.
- DOEE does not share the names of children with elevated lead levels with DCPS or public charter schools. This is confidential information between the family, pediatrician, and DOEE case managers.

**14. If there is no safe level of lead in blood, why is case management only available for children with a blood level of 5mg/Dl of blood or higher?**

- This is a standard that has been set by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

**15. Why do you prioritize children under the age of six?**

- Children under the age of six (6) have been long identified by the National Institutes of Health and CDC as being more susceptible to the health effects of lead exposure.

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**16. How can other students get screened?**

- To have your child screened for lead, please contact his or her pediatrician.
- If you need help finding a doctor, contact your health plan’s Member Services at the number printed on the back of your health insurance card.
- Do you need health insurance? You may qualify for Medicaid or subsidized health insurance. Visit <https://dchealthlink.com> for more information.
- If you don’t have health insurance, you can make an appointment with a community health provider:
  - Children’s National Medical Center, 888.884.2327
  - Mary’s Center, 844.796.2797
  - Unity Healthcare, 202.469.4699
- Families can also call 202.442.5559 or email [SchoolLeadQuestions@dc.gov](mailto:SchoolLeadQuestions@dc.gov) if they need additional help in identifying a primary care provider.

**17. Why is it preferable for children to get screened by their own pediatrician?**

- We suggest that children get screened by their own pediatrician because it is optimal for screening to occur with your preferred medical provider.
- Screening by your child’s pediatrician ensures that the child’s primary provider is informed promptly of results, which can then be included in the child’s permanent medical record.

**18. Will the modernization plan for schools change as a result of the water tests?**

- We haven’t seen any results that would necessitate us changing the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), for modernization of DC Public Schools.

**19. Have DPR facilities been tested previously?**

- Historically, not all DPR facilities have been tested.
- Once the testing at DCPS schools is complete, all DPR facilities will be tested. This testing will be complete prior to the start of DPR’s summer camps.

**20. What about Charter Schools?**

- DGS does not test charter schools.
- The DC Public Charter School Board is in the process of testing those schools that did not have lead testing recently. Three (3) firms have been hired to conduct testing at these locations.

**21. How can Charter Schools not housed in the DC/DGS Portfolio get their water tested?**

- The DC Public Charter School Board is in the process of testing all charter school campuses that have not had lead testing recently. This includes charters not housed in the DC/DGS portfolio.

**22. What are the overall results of the 2014, 2015, and 2016 tests?**

	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016 Blitz</b>
<b>Total Number of Schools Tested</b>	110	115	105	116
<b>Total Passed Samples</b>	3643	4155	3905	12713
<b>Total Actionable Samples</b>	47	28	15	483
<b>Total Samples Collected</b>	3690	4183	3920	13196
<b>Percentage of Passed Samples</b>	98.70%	99.30%	99.62	96.34%
<b>Percentage of Actionable Samples</b>	1.27%	0.67%	3.66%	3.66%

**23. What types of filters are used on our water fountains?**

- DGS uses Halsey Taylor HWF172 Watersentry VII filters on water fountains that have filters. (<http://www.halseytaylor.com/pdf/HWF172-Filter.pdf>)

**24. What do those filters filter? Lead? What else?**

- This filter has been tested to meet international standards, NSF/ANSI Standards 42 Chlorine, Particulate, Taste, and Odor, and NSF/ANSI Standard 53 for Reduction of Lead.

**25. Why doesn't DC Government replace all of the lead pipes and fixtures?**

- Lead pipes and fixtures are not intrinsically a problem. If a source has an actionable result, a filter is installed to remediate.

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**26. What are the effects of lead exposure?**

- Both children and adults are vulnerable to lead's health effects.
- Lead is a powerful neurotoxin, which means that exposure to lead can result in damage the brain. It can also injure other soft tissues and organs, interfere with the formation of blood, and exposure to enough lead can be deadly.
- Literature and research on lead exposure include:
  - a) *CDC lead home page:* <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>
  - b) *Lead in drinking water:*  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tips/water.htm>;  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead>
  - c) *American Academy of Pediatrics Healthy Children:*  
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Blood-Lead-Levels-in-Children-What-Parents-Need-to-Know.aspx>

**27. What is a safe level of lead in drinking water? What does DC government think is the safe standard? (e.g., 15 ppb vs. lower)**

- There is no national health-based standard for safe lead levels in drinking water.
- The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) standard is 20 ppb for schools and to be even more cautious, the District Government uses 1 ppb as a threshold.

**28. What are other common environmental sources of lead exposure?**

- The most common environmental sources of lead exposure include lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust in older buildings.
- Other sources include lead in contaminated soil and air, as well as in a variety of consumer products, including certain types of pottery, jewelry, toys, and imported foods.
- More information on common environmental sources of lead is available at <http://doee.dc.gov/lead> and <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/default.htm>.