

LEAD in Drinking Water

HEALTH EFFECTS OF LEAD

Lead is found throughout the environment in lead based paint, air, soil, household dust, food, certain types of pottery, porcelain and pewter, and water. Lead can pose a significant risk to your health if too much enters your body.

Lead builds up in the body over many years and can cause damage to the brain, red blood cells and kidneys. The greatest risk is to young children and pregnant women. Amounts of lead that wont hurt adults can slow down normal mental and physical development in growing bodies. In addition, a child at play often comes into contact with sources of lead contamination– like dirt and dust that rarely affect an adult. It is important to wash children’s hands and toys often, and try to make sure they only put food in their mouths.

LEAD IN DRINKING WATER

Lead in drinking water, although rarely the sole cause of lead poisoning, can increase a person’s total lead exposure, particularly in infants who drink baby formula and juices that are mixed with water. EPA estimates that drinking water can contribute to 20 percent or more of a person’s total exposure to lead.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and NMSU Water System are concerned about lead in your drinking water. In 2005, drinking water samples taken from on-campus facilities had lead levels above the EPA action level of 15 parts per billion (ppb), or 0.015 milligrams of lead per liter of water (mg/L). Since July 1, 2006, we have had a program in place to minimize lead in your drinking water.

This program includes:

- 1) Corrosion control treatment (treating the water to make it less likely that lead will dissolve into the water);
- 2) Source water treatment (removing any lead that is in the water at the time it leaves our treatment facility); and
- 3) A public education program

If you have any questions about the requirements of this program, please call us at (575) 646-2101.

HOW LEAD ENTERS OUR WATER

Lead is unusual among drinking water contaminants in that it seldom occurs naturally in water supplies like rivers and lakes. Lead enters drinking water primarily as a result of the corrosion, or wearing away, of materials containing lead in the water distribution system and household plumbing. These materials include lead-based solder used to join copper pipes, brass and chrome-plated brass faucets, and in some cases, pipes made of lead that connect houses an building to water mains (service lines). In 1986, Congress banned the use of lead solder containing greater than 0.2% lead, and restricted the lead content of faucets, pipes and other plumbing materials to 8.0%.

When water strands in lead pipes or plumbing systems containing lead for several hours or more, the lead may dissolve into your drinking water. This means the first water drawn from the tap in the morning or later in the afternoon, if the water has not been used all day, can contain fairly high levels of lead.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Your family physician can perform a blood test for lead and provide you with information about the health effects of lead. Further, the following agencies can be contacted:

- On-Campus Facilities & Services: (575) 646-7844
- New Mexico Environment Department: (575) 524-6300
- New Mexico Health Department: (575) 528-5001

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE To Reduce Exposure

1. FLUSH YOUR SYSTEM.

Let the water run from the tap before using it for drinking or cooking any time the water in a faucet has gone unused for more than six hours. The longer water resides in plumbing the more lead it may contain. Flushing the tap means running the cold water faucet for about 15-30 seconds. Although toilet flushing or showering flushes water through a portion of the plumbing system, you still need to flush the water in each faucet before using it for drinking or cooking. Flushing tap water is a simple and inexpensive measure you can take to protect your health. It usually uses less than one to two gallons of water.

2. USE ONLY COLD WATER FOR COOKING AND DRINKING.

Do not cook with or drink water from the hot water tap. Hot water can dissolve more lead more quickly than cold water. If you need hot water, draw water from the cold tap and then heat it.

3. USE BOTTLED WATER.

The steps described above will reduce the lead concentrations in your drinking water. However, if you are still concerned, you may wish to use bottled water for drinking and cooking.