

FAQ: Lead in drinking water

What is the situation in the City of Lethbridge?

City of Lethbridge water contains very low levels of lead. Tests of our drinking water have consistently shown lead levels less than 0.2 parts per billion, only 2 percent of the 10 parts per billion maximum acceptable limit.

However, if you live in an older home (built prior to 1955) with a lead service connection the amount of lead in the water at your tap may be higher. If your home has a lead service connection and you are pregnant or have children under the age of six, testing your water for lead is recommended.

How can I find out if my house has a lead service connection?

Here's how you can check if your service connection is lead. Locate your water meter, typically found in the basement and look at the pipe coming up through the basement floor into the water meter. Lead is grey in color, does not echo if you gently strike it, scratches easily, and leaves metallic marks when you rub the scratched area against white paper. The vast majority of water service connections are copper and the newest ones are white plastic.

If your home was built before 1955 and you suspect that you have a lead service connection, you can call the City of Lethbridge Public Operations at 320-3850 and request to have a Service Inspection. Our staff will help confirm if you have lead, lead alloy or galvanized steel pipes, and arrange for your water to be tested.

What is a service connection?

Service lines are the pipes that carry the water from the water main, which runs down each street, into each home. Some homes built before 1955 may still have lead service lines. Ownership and responsibility for water service lines is shared between the City of Lethbridge and the homeowner. The section of the service line from the water main to the property line is owned by the City, while the section from the property line to the house is the responsibility of the homeowner.

Any time a lead service line is encountered during routine repair or replacement of water or sewer mains in the street, the portion of the service owned by the City is replaced and the homeowner is notified of the discovery. Replacement of the homeowner's portion is encouraged, but not mandatory.

To discuss replacing the lead service lines to your house or replacement of portion of lead service lines on city property, contact the City of Lethbridge at 320-3850.

What can I do to reduce my exposure if I have a lead service connection?

Water should be flushed from the cold drinking water tap at medium flow for at least two minutes, if it has been sitting in the pipes for 6 hours or more. Additional flushing may be needed if an aerating screen is attached to your drinking water tap.

Use cold water for drinking and preparing food. Water from the hot water tap should not be consumed as it may contain more lead than the cold water.

Boiling your water will not remove lead. Lead levels in the water can increase as some of the water evaporates during the boiling process.

Children under the age of six and pregnant women could consider alternate sources of drinking water or use an approved filter attached to the tap. Make sure any filtration product you purchase is certified as meeting the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) International standard for lead reduction. Visit the NSF website at <http://www.nsf.org/consumer/> or contact them at 1-877-867-3435.

For health related questions contact the Chinook Health at 388-6650.

What is lead and what are the sources of lead exposure?

Lead is a naturally occurring bluish-grey material found in small amounts on the earth's outer layer. Lead also comes from industrial activities including burning fossil fuels, mining and manufacturing. Lead can be hazardous to human health.

Humans are exposed to lead in both indoor and outdoor environments. It is found in air, soil, dust, drinking water, food and various consumer products. Exposure to lead has decreased as sources have been eliminated, such as by eliminating leaded gasoline, paint and lead pipes.

Lead is present in the drinking water of most North American cities due to the use of lead pipe in older homes built before 1955 and the use of lead-containing soldering joints until the late 1980s.

If I do not have a lead service connection, do I need to be concerned?

No. The City of Lethbridge water contains very low levels of lead. Tests of our drinking water have consistently shown lead levels less than 0.2 parts per billion, only 2 percent of the 10 parts per billion maximum acceptable limit. Further, the high mineral content (hardness and alkalinity) of the water in Lethbridge greatly reduces the amount of lead that the water can acquire from plumbing fixtures that may contain lead. Our water tends to leave a mineral scale rather than corrode metal fixtures.

Additional Resources

Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation – Lead in Older Homes

http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/maho/yohoyohe/inaiqu/inaiqu_007.cfm

Health Canada – It's Your Health – Effects of Lead on Human Health

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/environ/lead-plomb_e.html

Health Canada – Lead Information Package

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/contaminants/lead-plomb/asked_questions-questions_posees_e.html

American Waterworks Association – Drink Tap – Water Quality

<http://www.drinktap.org/consumerdnn/Home/WaterInformation/WaterQuality/tabid/67/Default.aspx>