

FAQ for school divisions and public schools

What is lead?

Lead is a soft, heavy metal present in our environment. In the past, lead was used in the manufacturing of many products. Lead exposure has greatly reduced over the last 40 years due to the removal of lead in paint, gasoline, plumbing products, and more.

What are the possible health impacts of lead on children?

Low level lead exposure has been associated with effects on intellectual development and behavior of children. However, exposure to lead poses a risk to everyone's health. Other health effects, such as effects on blood pressure, have also been associated with relatively low levels of exposure.

How does lead get into drinking water?

Lead is not natural to Manitoba waters. It is introduced to drinking water through corrosion of lead piping, solder, fixtures, and service lines within older homes and buildings. For this reason, effective monitoring of lead levels requires collection from drinking water taps.

Why are schools and child care centres having their water tested?

In 2019, Health Canada updated the national guideline for lead in drinking water following new studies indicating health impacts occur at lower levels of lead exposure than previously identified. The new guideline lowered the acceptable maximum concentration of lead in drinking water (from 0.01mg/L to 0.005mg/L), and recommended testing drinking water at school taps and drinking water fountains. Manitoba adopting this guideline in 2020.

Infants and young children are most sensitive to lead exposure due to their developing brains. Low levels of lead exposure has been associated with effects on intellectual development and behavior. To protect students, all schools and child care centres should be testing all their drinking water taps to determine if their lead levels are below the guidelines, and if they are not, taking measures to address the problem as soon as possible.

How do schools and child care centres know if there is lead in their drinking water?

You cannot see, taste, or smell lead in water. Testing at the tap is the only way to find out if there is lead in the drinking water. To effectively test for lead, schools and child care centres are encouraged to develop and maintain a plumbing profile (inventory of pipes and fixtures), and a sampling plan to ensure all fixtures and faucets used for drinking water or food preparation are tested. Materials to guide schools and child care centres through this process can be found on the Environment and Climate webpage: <https://gov.mb.ca/sd/water/drinking-water/lead/>.

If test results show lead levels in drinking water are above the national guideline, what action can schools and child care centres take?

Public health officials recommend that schools take corrective action (e.g., remove handles, or otherwise prevent taps from being used for drinking water and provide an alternative source of drinking water) to prevent exposure to increased lead in drinking water as soon as possible. Such interim measures should be taken to prevent exposure until mitigation work is complete and proven successful (i.e., re-test results are below the guideline).

Longer term solutions, or mitigation actions, that can be undertaken to reduce lead in drinking water, may include replacing water fountains or taps, installing filtered bottle filling stations, and upgrading the plumbing system. It is essential to re-test drinking water following mitigation to ensure the work successfully reduced lead levels. Schools and child care centres can request up-front support or reimbursement for mitigation and re-testing costs from the provincial Lead in Drinking Water Grant Program.

How is the Province helping to support schools and child care centres to test and mitigate drinking water?

The Province is supporting schools and child care centres testing and mitigation efforts through funding established under the Lead in Drinking Water Grant Program. The program covers the costs of testing for lead in drinking water, and any mitigation actions, if needed.

Environment and Climate has partnered with the Manitoba Environmental Industries Association (MEIA) to administer the grant program. Any school that has not yet tested or mitigated should visit: <https://meia.mb.ca/lead-in-drinking-water-grant/>

[How can I reduce my family’s exposure to lead in drinking water?](#)

[The Province has developed a Frequently Asked Questions document for Parents, which will be available on the provincial Lead in Drinking Water webpage on June 7, 2023. Please direct them to: gov.mb.ca/sd/water/drinking-water/lead/](#)

[Where can your school or parents go for more information?](#)

If you have any questions, please consult or reach out to one of the resources below:

For questions related to the Lead in Drinking Water Grant:

Manitoba Environmental Industries Association
204-783-7090
drinkingwater@meia.mb.ca
meia.mb.ca/lead-in-drinking-water-grant/

For health-related concerns:

Visit Manitoba Health’s Be Aware of Lead website at:
www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/environmentalhealth/lead/index.html

If you have any health concerns about lead exposures, you can:

- Contact your local public health office:
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html>
- Call Health Links–Info Santé : 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 (toll-free)

For questions on the status of testing and mitigation:

For information on testing, correction action and mitigation work conducted at your school, contact your school division or school:

Manitoba School Divisions and Districts

www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/schools/sb_contacts.html

Schools in Manitoba

web.gov.mb.ca/school/school?action=top_page

For other inquiries

Office of Drinking Water

204-945-5762

odw@gov.mb.ca

gov.mb.ca/sd/water/drinking-water/

QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR SCHOOL'S PROGRAM

If your schools had not completed testing or mitigation, it is recommended you prepare responses to the following questions:

- What are the school's plans for testing the drinking water taps for lead?
- If tests results were elevated, what corrective measures has the school taken to prevent students from accessing the drinking water with increased concentrations of lead?
- If test results are elevated, what is the school's plan/ schedule for mitigating the source of lead exposure in the drinking water taps?
- When will the school be publicly communicating the results of their testing for lead in drinking water taps and corrective actions?