

# Understanding your Public Water Supply's *Action Level Exceedance* for lead in drinking water

## *What you should know / What you can do*

### What is an Action Level Exceedance (ALE)?

An Action Level Exceedance, or ALE, is a regulatory term used by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It means that at least 10 percent of tested homes on the same public water supply have drinking water containing more than 15 parts per billion (ppb) of lead (the regulatory “action level”). When tests show an ALE has occurred in a community, the water supplier must take action to reduce lead levels in the water—things like adjusting certain water treatments and replacing lead pipes. In the meantime, you can take action, too—by learning the facts about lead in drinking water and how you can protect your health.

### How does lead get into drinking water?

Lead can enter drinking water when it comes in contact with lead service lines (the pipes that bring water from the water main into your home) or with lead plumbing inside your home. Older homes can sometimes have lead water pipes. Drinking water faucets made before 2014 were allowed to contain up to 8 percent lead. When pipes or faucets containing lead begin to break down, the lead can get into your drinking water. The lead can be in soluble form, meaning dissolved in water, or particulate form, meaning small pieces of lead.

During required testing, your public water supply detected more than 15 ppb of lead in the drinking water of at least 10 percent of homes they tested. Now that an ALE has occurred, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) will ask the people who live in those homes for permission to do additional tests. MDHHS wants to find out whether the lead is coming from pipes inside or outside of the tested homes, so that the best possible advice can be given to protect you and your loved ones from lead.

### What health problems can lead cause?

When lead is swallowed, it can cause health problems. Swallowing lead can be a serious issue for children because their bodies and nervous systems are still developing. Too much lead can cause problems with:

- Learning
- Behavior
- Speech
- Hearing
- Growth rates
- Development of the nervous system

The only way to know if you have a recent or ongoing exposure to lead is to get a blood lead test. Your healthcare provider can do a simple blood test to see if you and your loved ones are being exposed.

If you are being exposed, removing the source of the lead is the best way to prevent future exposures. Good nutrition is another way to protect your family from lead. Include calcium, iron, and vitamin C in your family's diet. This can keep lead from being absorbed in the body.

### What steps can I take to reduce lead in my drinking water?

**Use a water filter.** When buying a filter, read the package to be sure it is certified to NSF/ANSI Standard 53 for lead reduction. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency also recommends that the filter be certified for NSF/ANSI Standard 42 for particulate reduction (Class 1). It is important to follow manufacturer's directions to install the filter and maintain it.

**MDHHS recommends that households with children younger than age 18 and/or pregnant women use cold filtered water for drinking, preparing food, and cooking. MDHHS recommends using cold filtered or bottled water for mixing powdered infant formula.**

A water filter system costs about \$30. Replacement cartridges cost about \$5-\$10 each and should be changed as directed by the manufacturer. If you are pregnant, live with a person who is pregnant, and/or have children younger

than age 18 and cannot afford a water filter system or replacement cartridges, you may be able to get them for free. To find out if you qualify, call your public water supply, your local health department, or MDHHS at 1-800-648-6942.

**Do not use hot water for drinking or cooking.** Lead dissolves more easily into hot water.

**Clean your faucet aerators.** Aerators (the mesh screens on your sink faucet) can trap pieces of particulate lead. Clean your drinking water faucet aerator at least every six months. If there is construction or repairs to the public water system or pipes near your home, clean your drinking water faucet aerator every month until the work is done.

**Replace older plumbing, pipes, and faucets that may add lead to water.** Older faucets, fittings, and valves sold before 2014 may contain up to 8 percent lead, even if marked “lead-free.” Look for replacement faucets made in 2014 or later and make sure they are certified to contain 0.25 percent lead or less.

**Don’t try to remove lead by boiling the water.** It won’t work. Water evaporates during boiling, so levels of lead in the water may end up higher than before boiling.

## What about flushing my pipes?

If you have not used your water for several hours, flushing your pipes (running water through them for a while) may reduce the amount of soluble (dissolved) lead. Follow your public water supply’s instructions on how long to flush your pipes. Meanwhile, MDHHS will be testing water from various homes in your community to verify the flushing time sufficiently reduces lead.

However, flushing may not help reduce the amount of lead particles in your water. Using an NSF/ANSI-certified filter is a way to ensure that both soluble and particulate lead is minimized. **MDHHS recommends that households with children younger than age 18 and/or pregnant women use a certified water filter until the public water supply or local health department indicates that the ALE has ended.**

Adults can use flushed water for:	Children younger than age 18 and pregnant women should use only cold filtered or	Anyone can use water that has not been filtered or flushed for:
Drinking and cooking Rinsing foods Brushing your teeth	Drinking and cooking Rinsing foods Brushing your teeth	Showering or bathing (avoid swallowing the water) Washing hands, dishes, or clothes Cleaning

## I’d like to test my water for lead. What should I know?

Testing your water with a certified lab is the only way to find out if lead is in your drinking water. Your public water supply may offer to test your water for free. If not, you can test it yourself. Visit [Michigan.gov/EGLElab](http://Michigan.gov/EGLElab) and choose “Drinking Water Laboratory” to learn how to order a test kit. The cost is typically \$30 and includes analysis by a certified laboratory.

Please note: a single water sample may not provide enough information to know if you actually have lead in your water, especially if your water has both particulate and dissolved lead. If you have questions about testing your water, you can contact the MDHHS Drinking Water Investigation Unit at 800-648-6942.

## For More Information

**Michigan Department of Health and Human Services**  
800-648-6942

Ask for the Drinking Water Investigation Unit

**List of Michigan Local Health Departments**

[Malph.org/Resources/Directory](http://Malph.org/Resources/Directory)

**Mi Lead Safe Website**

[Michigan.gov/MiLeadSafe](http://Michigan.gov/MiLeadSafe)

**Michigan Department of Environment,  
Great Lakes, and Energy**

800-662-9278

Laboratory Services

[Michigan.gov/EGLElab](http://Michigan.gov/EGLElab) and choose

“Drinking Water Laboratory”



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