



Ensuring Safe Water for Saint Paul Public Schools

Testing for Lead

How did you conduct the lead tests?

Saint Paul Public Schools tested more than 6,500 sources of drinking water in our buildings for lead. The testing was conducted on Sundays so that we were able to take a “worst case” sample of water that had been stagnant in the fixture for at least 12 hours. All but two drinking fountains and 11 hand washing sinks passed a flush test, that is the tap is opened for exactly 15 seconds before collecting the sample. Learn more about the testing process and results here <http://www.spps.org/Page/25769>.

What level of exposure to lead in water is considered “safe”?

The Minnesota Department of Health and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) both recommend that lead measures be below 15 parts per billion (ppb).

Should I be concerned if I was drinking from those water sources last year?

No, all but two drinking water fountains passed the flush test in our buildings which means that with regular use, lead would not have the opportunity to leach into the water. The data shows that unused or abandoned sinks in classrooms and other areas were most likely to test high for lead. The sampling that was done at SPPS was for a worst case situation where the fixture was unused for some time.

What are the health risks from lead?

Lead is a toxic metal, commonly found in, air, soil, dust, food, drinking water and in products such as lead based paint. Lead is harmful to human health when ingested or inhaled. High levels of lead in tap water can cause health effects if the lead in the water enters the bloodstream and causes an elevated blood lead level. Small levels of lead can build up over time and cause health risks. (MDH web site on Children’s Exposure to Lead in Drinking Water).

How will changing a faucet or water tap help prevent lead in the water? I thought lead was only in water pipes.

Lead can be found in some metal water taps, interior water pipes, or pipes connecting a house to the main water pipe in the street. Lead found in tap water usually comes from the corrosion of older fixtures or from the solder that connects pipes. When water sits in leaded pipes for several hours, lead can leach into the water supply.

Our data shows that city water is generally pretty good, and the water taps that are testing at higher lead levels are likely due to the fixture itself.





Why does one water fixture have high results, while the one right next to it does not?

Fixtures in one building can be made and installed across many years. Though the fixtures may look the same, each piece may have different parts. Others may have more exposed areas of lead that can leach into the water when it's left stagnant in the pipes.

How are you choosing which fixtures to fix first?

The Facilities Department will be fixing the fixtures (drinking water fountains, hand washing sinks, kitchen sinks, etc.) in the following order:

1. Drinking fountains will be replaced with hydrations stations (drinking water fountains with bottle fillers and filters). Sinks in kitchens, staff break areas, and nurse rooms.
2. Hand sinks will have the hardware replaced.
3. Other sources never used may stay shut off until the entire unit can be removed.
4. If hand washing sinks are needed before they can be fixed, it is allowable to apply a warning label that advises people to flush the water before consumption.

Four additional plumbers are being hired to help with this effort as well as a contractor to install hydration stations.

Learn more about lead in water

<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tips/water.htm>

Learn more about reducing children's exposure to lead in drinking water

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/water/factsheet/ncom/lead.pdf>

