

Filter First: Information for Teachers

K-12 Schools



Schools are Protecting the Health of Children

You may see some changes in your school care center this year, including new water bottle-filling stations, filters installed on faucets, and signs posted at water fixtures letting you know if the water is for drinking. These bottle-filling stations, filters, and signs are protective measures to reduce the risk of lead exposure in drinking water to children.

Health Effects of Lead

Children and infants are particularly vulnerable to lead. Even low levels of lead exposure can result in behavior and learning problems, lower IQ and hyperactivity, slowed growth, hearing problems, and more.

New Michigan Law

To better protect the health of children, the State of Michigan passed a law to reduce the risk of lead exposure in drinking water at K-12 public and nonpublic schools, and at child care centers where children spend a significant portion of their day. We call it “Filter First.”

For more information on Filter First, visit Michigan.gov/FilterFirst.

Lead in Plumbing Materials

Lead may be found in faucets, fittings, and pipes, whether the building is old or new. When water sits motionless in the building, such as overnight, over the weekend, or over longer breaks, lead may get into the drinking water. Even when water is sampled and lead is not detected, the risk of lead exposure remains. Testing is only a snapshot in time of water quality. Therefore, relying on test results may not fully protect children from lead. Proactive, protective action for all schools regardless of test results, is a safeguard against lead exposure.

Filter First Requirements for K-12 Public and Nonpublic Schools

Filter First requires schools to provide filtered drinking water. Lead reduction filters are very effective in reducing the risk of lead exposure if properly installed, used, and maintained. These filters are a protective measure, used as a precaution, to protect children from potential lead exposure.

Filter usage does not mean that there is lead in the water. Filter usage is like wearing a seat belt in the car. Wearing a seatbelt does not mean that you will get into an accident but protects you in case of an accident. Filter usage does not mean that lead is in the water but protects you in case there is.



New Signage

If a faucet has a sign that says, “for drinking” or “filtered water,” it means that the fixture has a lead reduction filter installed and is intended to be used for drinking or food preparation.

If a faucet has a sign that says, “not for drinking” or “hand washing only,” it means that the fixture does not have a lead reduction filter installed and is not intended to be used for drinking. It does not mean there is lead in the water but means there is no protection against potential lead exposure. It is safe to wash hands with water at faucets labeled as not for drinking. Human skin does not absorb lead.

Summary of Filter First Requirements

Filter First requires licensed child care centers to do the following:

- Develop and follow a drinking water management plan.
- Install bottle-filling stations with lead reduction filters.
- Install lead reduction filters on kitchen faucets or other faucets used for drinking or food preparation.
- Post signs at all water fixtures to show if the water is filtered and for drinking, or not. This helps direct children to drink from locations with protection against potential lead exposure.
- Collect samples once a year at every filtered fixture and have the samples tested for lead to ensure protection against potential lead exposure.
- Take immediate action if any test results detect lead.
- Notify parents and guardians, staff, and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) if sample results are greater than 5 parts per billion.

The Important Role of Teachers and School Staff

Teachers and staff members can help reduce the risk of lead exposure in drinking water by educating and directing children to filtered drinking water locations around the school. It is important that children know that these filters are a protective measure, used as a precaution, to protect them from potential lead exposure. Teachers and staff members are vital to the success of Filter First. You can help support Filter First by:

- Directing children to the nearest filtered bottle-filling station for drinking water.
- Showing children the different signs at fixtures around your school letting them know whether the water is for drinking or not.
- Teaching children how to properly use faucet-mounted filters on classroom faucets.
 - Faucet-mounted filters will have a lever that will switch the water from filtered to non-filtered. Follow the package instructions for which position the lever must be at to filter the water for drinking.



- Only use cold water when using the filter for drinking. Warm or hot water may damage the filter.
- The filter should be bypassed with the lever when washing hands or for purposes other than drinking or food preparation to save the filter cartridge lifespan.
- Showing children that faucet-mounted filters have status lights for the filter cartridges – if they see a yellow or red status light, they should notify a teacher.
- Teaching children that quality drinking water is needed for them to live, grow, and be strong.

Potential Messaging for Children

- Filters block lead from getting into the water like a basketball player blocks a ball from going into the hoop or a soccer goalie blocks a ball from going into the net.
- A green status light on a filter means the filter is readily blocking lead from getting into drinking water like a fresh, energized player blocking all the other players from scoring. A yellow status light on a filter is like the player starting to get tired, and allowing some of the other players to score, while the team stays in the lead. A red status light on a filter is like the player being completely exhausted, unable to block any shots, and needs to be taken out of the game. A tired player can't block as many shots as a fresh player can. An old filter with a red status light can't block as much lead from getting into drinking water like a new filter with a green status light can.
- Children can be an “assistant coach” and report “tired players” (yellow or red filter status lights) to teachers.
- Skin is watertight, and lead is too big to pass through the skin. It is safe to wash hands in water with a sign that says it is not for drinking.

Additional Resources

Learn more about lead in drinking water and any potential health effects of lead in drinking water:

- [Mi Lead Safe](#)
- [Basic Information about Lead in Drinking Water | US EPA](#)
- [Infographic: Lead in Drinking Water | US EPA](#)
- [About Lead in Drinking Water | Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention | CDC](#)

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