

Questions and Answers for Newark Drinking Water

August 11, 2019

What is EPA doing to protect the water in Newark?

In October 2018, sampling conducted as the result of an EPA audit of the Lead and Copper Rule implementation in NJ showed that the chemical used to prevent corrosion of pipe in the Pequannock service area of Newark was no longer effective and that the protective lining of the service lines was sloughing off, carrying lead particles in the process. Newark, with technical assistance from EPA and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), adjusted its corrosion control treatment and has been conducting a study of the new treatment's effectiveness.

Also, upon learning of the problem in October 2018 the city distributed filters to protect public health until the new corrosion control successfully coated the pipes, preventing lead from entering drinking water.

As part of its comprehensive and aggressive efforts to help protect the people of Newark from lead in its drinking water, EPA has been working in partnership with the City of Newark and NJDEP to assess Newark's new lead corrosion control treatment effectiveness. This includes providing laboratory analyses for samples and consulting with city and state officials to suggest improvements to the corrosion control program.

EPA has invested, and will continue to invest, significant resources in Newark. EPA has worked on Newark's drinking water issues with community leaders and the state every step of the way as a collaborative problem solver. Additionally, EPA worked with the state to accelerate funding for lead line replacement program and is actively providing technical assistance, including work to optimize and assess its corrosion control program.

What is occurring in Newark?

This summer, the City of Newark began a study to determine the effectiveness of its new corrosion control treatment (CCT). EPA is providing support by conducting lab analyses. Results of initial sampling done in July 2019 at three households indicated that filters were not bringing the level of lead down at two of the three households. Newark contractors conducted confirmatory sampling and results of that analysis again indicated that the filters may not be reducing the levels of lead as anticipated. As a result, on Friday, August 9, EPA sent a letter recommending that the state and city take immediate action and requested a response to EPA's recommendations by close of business on Monday, August 12.

What is flushing and can it remove lead in Newark's system?

Flushing or running the tap has been shown to reduce the levels of lead in drinking water that has sat in the pipes and plumbing for periods of time because it moves the water that has been in contact with the lead pipe through the tap before a customer uses the water. Flushing has been

shown to assist with moving the corrosion control treatment through the system and will assist long-term with reducing lead in the Newark system. Running water long enough to assure the water that sat in household plumbing and service lines is flushed will reduce lead levels. The results of samples taken at three Newark homes did show a reduction in lead levels for filtered sampling taken after flushing. The results from these households indicate that the lead is mostly particulate lead, which is likely a result of the unstable pipe scale from the previous corrosion control treatment. Particulate lead can be unpredictable because the particulates can break off randomly, so high and low lead levels can be inconsistent.

Out of an abundance of caution, EPA recommends that people who have lead service lines or suspected lead service lines should be advised to use bottled water for drinking and cooking. People should continue to run their tap water and also use tap water for purposes other than cooking or drinking. Keeping water running through the lines should help Newark's newly improved corrosion control treatment work better.

Why is EPA recommending that the citizens of Newark stop using filters?

At this time, EPA is unable to determine if the drinking water filters provided by the City of Newark are effectively reducing levels of lead in drinking water.

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Why is EPA recommending action based on sampling from three households?

EPA, which provided the laboratory analyses for samples taken by Newark's contractor at these three households, is recommending action after confirmatory sampling showed that post-filter lead levels were still elevated in two of the households. In addition, the second round of testing used new filters to rule out human error and/or manufacturer defects. EPA believes a conservative approach is the right course at this time until Newark, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and EPA can determine what may be causing the levels to remain elevated. Newark is already conducting further sampling that will inform a long-term course going forward.

Is it true that not using water for drinking or cooking in homes connected to lead service lines will hurt the ability for Newark's new corrosion control system to work properly?

The majority of water flowing into homes is not for drinking and cooking, but rather for other household needs, such as flushing toilets, washing, showering and bathing. As long as people continue to use water for those purposes, enough water should flow to continue to optimize the new corrosion control treatment.

I am using a filter to remove lead from my drinking water, should I be concerned?

Filter effectiveness is dependent on operator use, water chemistry and the level of the contaminants [e.g. lead]. In a study conducted by EPA and the State of MI, EPA found that when properly used and maintained, the filters removed lead from drinking water even at concentrations greater than 150 parts per billion (ppb). Lead levels in filtered water averaged less than 0.3 ppb. EPA recommends that citizens that are concerned about the safety of their drinking water contact their water provider.

How do I know if I am using my filter properly?

EPA recommends following the manufacturer's instructions to ensure proper use. Provided is a fact sheet that includes general instructions on how to use a filter: <https://www.epa.gov/flint/fact-sheets-flint-residents>

Is it safe for adults to shower or bathe with unfiltered water? Can babies be bathed in tap water?

Yes. Your skin does not absorb lead in water. If plain tap water has too much lead, bathing and showering is still safe for children and adults. It is safe even if the skin has minor cuts or scrapes. Never drink bathwater, and do not allow babies and children to drink bathwater. If you have concerns, call your primary care doctor.

Is it safe to wash dishes and do laundry with unfiltered water?

Yes, but dry them after. Wash dishes, bottles, and toys with unfiltered soapy water. Dry before use. Lead in water will not be absorbed by porcelain, metal, or glass. Clothes washed in plain tap water will not contain enough lead to cause harm.

What does lead in drinking water come from?

The most common sources of lead in drinking water are lead pipes, faucets, and fixtures. Lead pipes are more likely to be found in older cities and homes built before 1986. To find out for certain if you have lead in drinking water, have your water tested.

How can I reduce exposure to lead in drinking water?

People who are concerned about lead in their drinking water can take steps to reduce their exposure including:

- Use only cold water for drinking, cooking and making baby formula. Remember, boiling water does not remove lead from water.
- Before drinking, flush your home's pipes by running the tap, taking a shower, doing laundry, or doing a load of dishes.
- Regularly clean your faucet's screen (also known as an aerator).
- If you use a filter certified to remove lead, don't forget to read the directions to learn when to change the cartridge. Using a filter after it has expired can make it less effective at removing lead.

- Contact your water company to determine if the pipe that connects your home to the water main (called a service line) is made from lead. Your area's water company can also provide information about the lead levels in your system's drinking water.

For more visit: <https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/infographic-lead-drinking-water>

What is the status of the Lead and Copper Rule?

EPA is currently working on updating the Lead and Copper Rule. The agency anticipates issuing the proposal this summer.

Are the filters in Flint working?

In 2016, during its response to lead in drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan, EPA tested Brita and PUR brand water filters that are NSF-certified to remove lead. The filters are rated to remove lead at levels of 150 ppb or less. Samples of unfiltered and filtered drinking water were collected by EPA, Michigan DEQ and others at over 345 locations across the city. In a small number of samples, lead levels were greater than 150 ppb. After testing the water in Flint, EPA found that when properly used and maintained, the filters removed lead from drinking water even at concentrations greater than 150 ppb. Lead levels in filtered water averaged less than 0.3 ppb and all sample results were well below EPA's action level. The filter test data supports the conclusion that the use of filtered Flint water would protect all populations in Flint, including pregnant women and children, from exposure to lead-contaminated water.