

Lead testing of drinking water

FAQ for Licensed Child Care Facilities in the VCH region

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Why is VCH testing lead levels in all licensed child care facilities?

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) is currently working with child care licensees in support of a directive by the BC Ministry of Health and Provincial Health Officer to conduct a survey and test the lead levels in the drinking water of all licensed child care facilities operating in our region.

What is the importance of monitoring lead levels in drinking water?

Exposure to lead in drinking water can cause negative health effects if left undetected and unmanaged. The issue of lead in drinking water can occur in homes, schools and other settings throughout British Columbia, Canada and worldwide. Lead was once a commonly used material in the plumbing of buildings. When water sits in building piping, lead can be released from the plumbing into the water. It is difficult to predict which facilities may have elevated levels of lead based on the age of the building, or maintenance and renovation history. This is why public health is sampling and analyzing water quality of individual facilities to reduce the risk of potential negative health effects associated with lead exposure.

What is a safe level?

While lead levels should be as low as reasonably achievable, Health Canada has set the maximum acceptable concentration (MAC) of lead in drinking water to 5 parts per billion. If lead levels in drinking water are higher than the MAC, actions can be taken to reduce the risk of negative effects, including testing the drinking water and taking measures to reduce lead levels.

What are the health concerns?

The health impact of lead exposure depend on many factors including the amount and length of exposure, age, nutrition and underlying health issues. According to Health Canada, low levels of lead exposure over a period of time can be harmful to health, especially for young children and for normal fetal development. People may ingest lead from many sources, such as food, drinking water, soil, paint, and dust. Further information is available on [HealthLink BC](#).

What if the lead levels in the drinking water of a childcare facility are high?

Currently all licensed child care facilities within the VCH region are required to flush cold water taps used for drinking or food preparation for one to five minutes, or until the water runs cold. Should a facility have high lead levels in their sample, the licensee will be required to review options to reduce the lead level, with support from VCH Health Protection. These options may include additional flushing; replacement of specific taps, components or pipes; use of filters approved for the removal of lead; or other evidence-based approaches. An Environmental Health Officer or Licensing Officer may repeat water testing once these interventions have been implemented to ensure a sustained reduction in lead levels.

Should my child have blood testing done?

The detection of lead in a child care facility's drinking water does **not** mean that blood testing is required. Testing should be based on the recommendations of an individual's health care provider, or public health programs. The most important thing to do is identify and remove all suspected sources of lead exposure. Anyone who has concerns or questions can visit Health Link BC or contact our Health Protection program for further information.

Additional Resources

Lead in Drinking Water: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/lead-drinking-water>

Lead paint and Hazards: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/lead-paint-and-hazards>

Lead Poisoning: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/lead-poisoning>