Drinking Water and Lead: Comprehensive Information

Why Did I Receive a Letter About Lead in Drinking Water?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's **Lead and Copper Rule Revisions (LCRR)**, effective December 16, 2021, mandate water systems to:

- **Create Service Line Inventories**: Document the materials in all water service lines, identifying those made of lead or galvanized steel.
- **Expand Water Sampling**: Test water in homes, schools, and daycare facilities for lead levels.
- **Provide Public Education**: Inform residents about the risks of lead exposure and ways to mitigate these risks.

These letters are part of a federal effort to evaluate and address lead in service lines. Receiving a letter does **not** mean your home has lead pipes or that your water is unsafe.

Understanding Your Service Line

A **service line** is the pipe connecting your home to the water main. These pipes may contain materials like copper, lead, or galvanized steel.

- Locate your service line where it enters your home, often near the water meter in the basement or crawl space.
- Use the EPA's **"Protect Your Tap" guide** (link here) to identify the material.

If the material is **unknown**, municipalities may ask you to:

- **Self-Report**: Check and report your findings, as in the City of Lockport's program.
- **Schedule Inspections**: Participate in broader initiatives like the City of North Tonawanda's 2025 meter replacement project.

If Lead or Galvanized Pipes Are Identified

Residents will receive a letter confirming the findings along with guidance to reduce lead exposure:

- **Flush Taps**: Run water for 30–60 seconds before use, especially after periods of inactivity, to clear stagnant water.
- **Use Cold Water**: Only use cold water for cooking and drinking, as hot water dissolves lead more easily.
- **Clean Aerators**: Remove and clean faucet screens monthly to prevent lead particles from accumulating.

- **Install NSF-Certified Filters**: Ensure filters are certified to remove lead and follow manufacturer instructions for maintenance.

Residents with lead pipes may also consider testing their water. Certified laboratories include:

- **Eurofins Buffalo**, Amherst, NY: (716) 691-2600
- **Pace Analytical**, Tonawanda, NY: (716) 783-9291
- **ALS Environmental**, Rochester, NY: (585) 288-5380

Local Efforts in Niagara County

Public water suppliers in Niagara County, including the Niagara Falls Water Board and other municipal systems, implement measures to protect residents from lead exposure:

- **Corrosion Control Treatments**: Applied to reduce lead release into water from aging pipes.
- **Regular Compliance Testing**: Conducted every three years under the New York State Lead and Copper Rule, focusing on homes with known lead or galvanized service lines.
- **Results**: Niagara County's public water systems have not exceeded regulatory limits for lead or copper in the **95th percentile water sampling results**.

Lead Risks Beyond Water

While addressing lead in water is vital, the most significant source of lead poisoning in older homes is **lead-based paint and dust**, particularly in buildings constructed before 1978:

- Lead poisoning often occurs from peeling or chipping paint or dust from friction surfaces like windows and doors.
- Children under six are especially vulnerable, as exposure to even **5 micrograms per deciliter (µg/dL)** of lead in blood can cause long-term health effects.
- If you're concerned, contact your pediatrician for blood lead testing and guidance.

Best Practices to Reduce Lead Exposure

Residents should take proactive measures to reduce lead exposure:

- **Determine Your Service Line Material**: Locate and identify the material using the EPA's guide, or contact your local water authority for assistance.
- **Flush Taps Regularly**: Run cold water for several minutes before drinking or cooking if the water has been sitting idle.
- **Use Lead-Free Plumbing Materials**: Replace older pipes, fixtures, and fittings with certified lead-free options.
- **Test Your Water**: If you suspect lead contamination, have your water tested by a certified lab.

Next Steps in the Service Line Inventory Process

The service line inventory is the first step in identifying and addressing lead service lines:

- Municipalities must complete inventories to determine the material of all service lines.
- Once identified, plans for replacement can be developed, potentially supported by federal or state funding programs.

Key Resources for Residents

- **EPA "Protect Your Tap" Guide**: Protect Your Tap: Quick Check for Lead.
- **New York State Department of Health Lead Testing**: New York State Department of Health Lead Testing
- **Licensed Testing Labs**: Contact details above.
- **Safe Drinking Water Hotline**: (800) 426-4791

This initiative ensures compliance with federal regulations and prioritizes public health by addressing potential lead risks in drinking water. For more information, consult your local water authority or the EPA.

Additional Resources:

- https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-10/final_lcri_fact-sheet_general_public.pdf
- Basic Information about Lead in Drinking Water | US EPA
- Licensed Testing Laboratories
- Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper: https://bnwaterkeeper.org/drinking-water/
- CDC Lead in Drinking Water: https://www.cdc.gov/lead-prevention/prevention/drinking-water.html#:~:text=The%20most%20common%20sources%20of,1986%20may%20also%20contain%20lead.