

10 Steps to Make Your Tap Water Baby-Safe

How to remove lead, for water that is safer for your family and for making infant formula



Nearly 80% of homes have lead in their tap water.

Lead exposure is not safe for anyone, but pregnant women, formula-fed infants, and young children are most at risk. Lead can harm the developing brain, and often builds up in children's bodies in greater amounts than in adults.

1 USE A WATER FILTER CERTIFIED TO REMOVE "TOTAL LEAD."

A water filter certified to remove lead is a good safeguard for almost every home. Use NSF International's "[Certified Product Listings for Lead Reduction](#)" Guide to find a filter that is NSF/ANSI 53 certified.

Try a pour-through pitcher like ZeroWater RedyPour or a filter that mounts to the kitchen faucet, like Pur or Brita models.

Use filtered water for drinking and cooking. Filtered water is especially important for formula-fed infants.

2 TEST YOUR WATER FOR LEAD.

Your water utility may offer free tests. Make sure their test includes at least 2 sample bottles for lead. One-sample tests can miss lead sources in pipes further from your faucet. Check your results against the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommended lead-in-water limit for children of 1 part per billion (1 ug/L, or 0.001 mg/L).

HBBF and Virginia Tech offer an at-cost 3-sample test that you can order online at hbbf.org/lead-drinking-water. You'll get a personalized action report based on the test results.

3 UNSCREW YOUR FAUCET AERATOR AND RINSE OUT ANY TRAPPED PARTICLES AT LEAST EVERY SEASON.

Most faucets have a small screen or aerator at the open end (where the water comes out). Particles from lead pipes can get trapped there and put lead in your water. It's easy to unscrew and rinse out the aerator to remove any particles caught there.

4 RETEST YOUR WATER EVERY TWO YEARS OR WHENEVER THERE'S A CHANGE IN YOUR RISK.

Test results are a snapshot of lead in your water when you sampled. Retesting periodically a good idea. Retest when:

- You are planning a pregnancy or are newly pregnant.
- You plan to begin using water to make infant formula.
- There is road or pipe work on your block, or if you make changes to your plumbing. This can dislodge lead from pipes and valves.
- You learn that your utility has changed its water source or treatment process. Read your water bill inserts and yearly water quality report for updates.
- During summer. Warmer water can pull more lead from pipes.

Using a filter certified to remove lead can protect you from these unexpected changes.

5 KEEP YOUR WATER FILTER WORKING.

Replacing the filter cartridge is important. An old cartridge will let lead through and can also harbor bacteria.

6 DON'T ASSUME BOTTLED WATER IS BETTER

Bottled water can also have lead in it. Check the brand's online water quality report to make sure that lead is not detected. In most cities filtered tap water is a better choice, with its low cost and no plastic waste.

7 FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO CHECK FOR LEAD IN YOUR HOME'S WATER PIPES AND SERVICE LINE

Millions of homes in the U.S. have lead in water pipes and solder that can leach into their tap water.

You are at higher risk for lead in your water if you have any of these 3 risk factors:

- Brass fixtures installed before 2014, or a new fixture within the last month.
- A service line installed before 1986 (this is the outside pipe that runs from your home to the street).
- Pre-1986 copper pipes, which can have lead solder.

Homes with these items are at risk even if current lead levels in water are low. Lead-bearing plumbing can begin to release lead into the water when your water utility changes treatment methods or disturbs pipes during maintenance.

Water utilities add chemicals that coat the pipes to keep lead from leaching out, but sometimes it's not enough. Here's how to check if you have lead pipes or solder:

- **Copper water pipes installed before 1986.** These can be joined with lead solder. Check if your solder is lead by carefully scratching with a key. It's probably lead if the scratch mark is bright silver. Don't use a knife or other sharp tool. Wash the key off when you are finished. A water filter will remove lead that leaches from solder.
- **Water service lines installed before 1986.** The service line connects your house to the neighborhood's main water pipe. It normally comes through a wall of your home, often in the basement, and then connects to the rest of your home plumbing. Pipes installed before 1986 might be made of lead. Call your water utility to see if they have a record of your pipe type.

You can check the service line yourself with the steps below.

Lead service lines are a dull gray color and are soft. Check if your pipe is lead by carefully scratching with a key. If it's lead, the scratch mark will be bright silver. Don't use a knife or other sharp tool, and take care not to puncture the pipe. Wash the key off when you are finished.

If you have a lead service line, call your water utility to learn of any plans to replace it. Some utilities and cities have replaced all lead service lines city-wide. Replacement should involve the entire lead pipe from the water main to the home. Replacing only a portion of the pipe can disturb remaining lead pipes and increase the lead in your water.

8 DRINK AND COOK WITH WATER FROM THE COLD TAP, AND MAKE SURE IT'S NOT DISCOLORED.

- Always drink, cook, and make infant formula with water from the cold tap. Hot water leaches more lead from your plumbing than cold.
- Never drink discolored water or water with solid particles. This can be a sign of high lead levels.
- Boiling your water does not remove lead. Instead, lead levels can increase as water boils off and the lead is left behind.

9 FLUSH YOUR WATER LINES FOR 45 SECONDS BEFORE DRINKING.

If you can't use a water filter, running your water for 45 seconds before using it for drinking or cooking can reduce lead levels in many homes. **If you have a lead service line, run the water for 5 minutes instead.**

Studies show that lead can build up again in water within 10 minutes of flushing. To avoid having to flush frequently, you can flush once and then fill a container. Store it in the refrigerator and use that water for drinking and cooking.

An alternate, safer solution is to use a home water filter certified to remove lead.

10 ASK YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT BLOOD LEAD TESTS FOR YOUR CHILDREN.

Any child can have high blood lead levels. You have to test to know. The tests help doctors and parents find children who have too much lead in their blood. Parents can then take action to get rid of lead sources where the child spends time.

A blood lead test is usually recommended for children at ages 1 and 2. It is especially important for children in these higher risk groups:

- Living in a home built before 1960 that has recently been renovated, repaired, or painted, or that has been poorly maintained.
- Living in a home or building where siblings or other children have had elevated blood lead levels.
- Arriving to the U.S. as immigrants, refugees, or through international adoption.

Even children who seem healthy may have dangerous levels of lead in their bodies. Some states require all children to be tested. Medicaid covers blood lead tests for children.

