

LEAD & DRINKING WATER



The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been working closely with water agencies across the nation to update regulations concerning the amount of lead in drinking water.

In some parts of the country, homes built before 1986 (when plumbing rules changed) commonly contained lead pipes, fixtures and solder. Fortunately lead pipes were not common in California; the most common problem in California homes today concerns copper pipes connected with lead solder, and with older brass faucets and fixtures. These can leach significant amounts of lead into the water, especially hot water.

Investigating lead water service lines

As part of compliance with the EPA's Revised Lead and Copper Rule, public water systems across the nation are required to create an inventory of water service lines before Oct. 16, 2024, focusing on the presence of lead. Water service lines are the small pipes and joints (also known as "fittings") that connect the plumbing in your home to the large water main under the street.

In California, water systems were required to develop their inventories on the public side of the service line (from the water main under the street to the meter), by 2018, and submit a plan for replacement of all lead pipes and fittings by 2020. Fortunately, according to the statewide inventory, there are no more public lead service lines in service in California. However, the state requirement only included the public side (from the water main under the street to the meter), and not the private side (from the meter to the building). As part of the EPA requirements, water systems must update their inventories to include both parts of the service lines.

Agencies are submitting completed inventories to the State Water Resources Control Board, which is collecting them on behalf of the EPA. These inventories must be publicly available, and for large water systems they must be available online.

How do I know if the drinking water at my home contains lead?

Since you cannot see, taste, or smell lead in water, testing is the only sure way of telling whether lead is present. If your home has lead pipes (lead is a dull gray metal that is soft enough to be easily scratched with a house key), or if you see signs of corrosion (frequent leaks, rust-colored water, stained dishes or laundry) you may want to have your water tested for lead. Ask your water provider if it can test your water for lead, or if it can recommend a testing laboratory. If you want to hire a laboratory yourself, make sure it is certified by the state to perform lead tests in drinking water.

Protecting against lead

If you are unsure about lead levels in your water, or if your home was constructed before 1986, particularly if it was built in the 1940s, you can take the following precautions:

- **Flush your tap.** Run water for 15-30 seconds or until it reaches a steady temperature before using it for drinking or cooking. If lead is present, it will be highest when the water has been sitting in contact with the fixture for a long time. Flushing pushes potential lead-containing water from the pipes and brings in fresh water from the water main.
- **Use cold water for cooking.** Lead dissolves more easily into hot water so use cold water for cooking or to make baby formula. Boiling water does not remove lead.
- **Filter the water.** You may want to consider purchasing a water filter if lead is present in the water. Read the package to be sure the filter is certified to reduce lead or contact NSF International at 800-673-8010 or www.nsf.org for information on performance standards for water filters.
- **Test your water for lead.** Many public water agencies can assist with this testing. If you decide to use a commercial laboratory, make sure it is certified by the state to perform the analysis.
- **Determine whether your plumbing fixtures contain lead.** Older faucets are more likely to be a problem compared to new ones. Since 2010, California law prohibits the sale of faucets that are not lead free. The definition of lead-free has become more stringent over the years, and new faucets manufactured since 2014 leach very little lead into water. If you have an old faucet, particularly one made with brass components before 1986, you should consider testing your water for lead.

Transparency

Public water agencies are proud to provide safe drinking water that communities can trust. Contact your local water agency to review its annual water quality report, lead pipe inventory or receive additional information.

Additional Resources

[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(www.epa.gov\)](http://www.epa.gov)

[Protect your Tap: A Quick Check for Lead](#)

[CA State Water Resources Control Board \(www.waterboards.ca.gov\)](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov)

[SWRCB: Lead and Copper Rule for Drinking Water](#)

[FAQs \(March 2023\) - Lead and Copper Rule Revisions | Lead Service Lines Inventory](#)

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ACWA is a non-profit statewide association of more than 470 public agencies that are responsible for about 90% of the water deliveries in California.

