

Understanding the Dangers of Lead

Protecting your family from lead in drinking water

What is Lead and Why is it Dangerous?

Lead is a naturally occurring metal that was once widely used in paint, plumbing, gasoline, and other household materials before its health risks were fully understood. A main concern for many older homes today is lead in drinking water, which can occur when water travels through lead service lines.

Common sources of lead include:

- Lead service lines or lead plumbing inside the home
- Lead-based paint or dust in older buildings
- Contaminated soil or tracked-in dust
- Certain children's toys, jewelry, or imported products

Even small amounts of lead can build up in the body over time and cause serious harm.



How Lead Exposure Affects Individuals

Infants & Children

Children under 6 are especially vulnerable. Their bodies absorb lead more easily, and their developing brains and nervous systems are highly sensitive to its effects.

Lead exposure may cause:

- Developmental delays or learning difficulties
- Behavior concerns or irritability
- Slowed growth
- Hearing problems
- Stomach pain, vomiting, or constipation

Pregnant Individuals

During pregnancy, the body may release lead stored in the bones. This lead can travel through the bloodstream to the developing baby.

Even low levels of exposure may increase the risk of:

- Miscarriage or early delivery
- Low birth weight or slowed growth
- Brain, kidney, or nervous system effects
- Long-term learning and behavior issues

Adults

Adults can also experience health impacts from lead exposure over time, including:

- Increased blood pressure
- Kidney damage
- Reproductive challenges



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How to Reduce Exposure to Lead

EquiFlow is working to replace lead service lines in Westerly and reduce the risk of lead in drinking water. If you are concerned about lead in your drinking water, you should:

- ✓ **Complete Service Line Verification**
Verification, whether done or through an in-person inspection, provides a clear answer about your home's service line material. Once your line is verified, your home is added to the EquiFlow system to determine eligibility for a lead service line replacement.
- ✓ **Use a Certified Water Filter**
If lead is detected, use a filter labeled NSF/ANSI Standard 53 or 58 for lead removal. Use filtered or bottled water for drinking, cooking, and preparing baby formula.
- ✓ **Flush Your Pipes**
Run cold water for at least five minutes before using it for drinking or cooking, especially if water has been sitting in the pipes for several hours.
- ✓ **Clean Faucet Aerators**
Faucet aerators can trap small particles, including lead. Remove and clean them regularly to help reduce potential buildup.
- ✓ **Talk to Your Doctor**
If you are pregnant or have children under 6, ask your healthcare provider whether a blood lead test is recommended.

Prevention starts with awareness: understanding the risks of lead and understanding your own service line. When residents complete verifications and ROEs, Westerly gains the information needed to prioritize work and strengthen community health.

Contact Us

Have questions about lead, your service line, or how the EquiFlow program can help your family? We're here to support you.

Scan the QR code to visit our website and access helpful resources.

