For Multnomah County families concerned about elevated lead in water fixtures

Portland Public Schools (PPS) reported elevated lead levels at some Creston and Rose City Park School water fixtures. PPS already had a plan to test all fountains and faucets in the district this summer. All PPS schools will use bottled water for all students, faculty and staff for the remainder of the school year.

A Multnomah County Health Department analyst conducts blood lead screening in Portland in May 2016.

Anyone who has a child, or is pregnant, and is concerned about the risk of lead exposure from school drinking water or any other source, can:

Be tested for lead. A blood test is the only way to find out if a person has lead poisoning. Children can be poisoned by lead, but not look or act sick. A blood test will find lead in the body from the last 3-4 months. See your healthcare provider about a blood test for lead.

Make sure your child is not exposed to lead in other places. Homes and apartments built before 1978 may have lead paint. Carefully clean up any chipped paint and keep paint in good condition. If you plan on remodeling, check for lead first and hire only licensed and certified contractors. People can also be exposed to lead through old household plumbing fixtures, auto repair, soldering, making sinkers or bullets, stained glass, and pottery.

Make sure your child eats plenty of iron (meat, fish, beans), calcium (milk, yogurt, spinach), and vitamin C (berries, oranges, tomatoes). A good diet helps protect young bodies from the health problems associated with lead exposure.

Testing blood for lead:

To find out how much lead is in a person's body, a small amount of blood is taken from the arm. In very young children, blood may be taken from a finger or heel. Blood taken from an arm vein (called a venous blood test) is the most reliable test. Blood lead tests tell how many micrograms (millionth of a gram) of lead are in each deciliter (tenth of a liter) of a child's blood (µg/dL).

The Multnomah County Health Department and some medical clinics screen for lead using a finger-prick test. This is easier and less scary for children. A high result from this screening should always

be double-checked with a venous blood test. The Health Department steps in to assist children and pregnant women with a blood level at, or above, 5 µg/dL.

Some alternative health care providers may suggest testing for lead in hair or urine. These methods have not been shown to be as reliable as a blood test.

"Chelation" refers to medicines that are given by mouth or through an intravenous line to remove metals from the body. This type of treatment should only be used under medical supervision for dangerously high lead levels.

Some information sources mention herbal medicines as "herbal chelation" therapy. The use of "herbal chelation" to lower an elevated blood lead level has not been proven safe or effective. It is important to discuss alternative therapies, including the use of herbal supplements, with your healthcare provider.

Lead investigations in Multnomah County

The Multnomah County Health Department screens young children for lead exposure. School-aged kids are not tested for lead very often. Children under age 3 are most likely to be screened for lead because they are more likely to get lead in their mouths, and their developing brains are more sensitive to the effects of lead.

From 2013 to 2016, more than 15,000 lead tests were conducted in Multnomah County. Of those, elevated blood lead levels were found in 188 children. Eighteen of the children were ages 5 to 19. The rest were under age 5. No cases were traced to lead in drinking water from any source.

Lead and the body:

Lead poisoning occurs when too much lead builds up in the body. Children and adults are usually exposed by breathing or swallowing dust or debris from paint that contains lead. Once absorbed, lead affects almost every organ and system in the body. Even a little lead can make children slower learners. Very high levels of lead exposure can cause coma, seizures and death.

Exposure to lead can cause:

- Brain damage and lower intelligence
- Behavior and learning problems
- Impaired speech and language
- Slowed growth
- Kidney and liver damage

Read more: *https://multco.us/health/lead-poisoning-prevention/*

https://public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyEnvironments/HealthyNeighborhoods/LeadPoisoning/ParentsFamilies/Pages/prevent_child.aspx

http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/