# Water Quality and Water Testing Frequently Asked Questions

**UPDATED May 1, 2018**

Portland Public Schools will update and maintain a list of frequently asked questions and answers regarding water quality in our schools. Questions can be submitted at pubinfo@pps.net.

## Health Impacts of Lead in Drinking Water

## Q. Where can I get information about health impacts from lead in drinking water?

**A.** Multnomah County Health Department and the Oregon Health Authority are the agencies with the expertise in and responsibility for preventing and addressing health impacts from lead. Multnomah County operates a “lead line” email at leadline@multco.us and a telephone information line at 503-988-4000. The health department website provides excellent information and answers about lead risks. <https://multco.us/health/lead-poisoning-prevention>

**Q. What opportunities are available for lead screening?**

**A:** Currently**,** freeblood lead testing is available through Multnomah County for children 6 and under and pregnant women. You can learn more about upcoming clinics by visiting <https://multco.us/health/lead-poisoning-prevention/test-your-child-lead>.

## Safe Water Distribution

**Q. What is the plan for water delivery during the 2017-18 school year?**

**A.** PPS has installed 5 gallon water dispensers in central locations in each school. All drinking fountains have been turned off or covered, but water is on in bathrooms and sinks for hand washing.

PPS will be replacing water fixtures throughout the 2017-18 school year followed by testing water for lead and copper. This process should result in drinking fountains being made accessible in many schools.

**Q: Can families send bottled water with their students?**

**A:** Yes, but PPS is encouraging parents to send reusable water bottles that can be filled from safe drinking water sources at school. Safe drinking water will be available at all schools for all students, faculty and school staff.

**Q: Will all drinking fountains and kitchen fixtures for food preparation be operational at some point during the 2017-18 school year?**

**A:** PPS is making every effort to replace all drinking and food preparation fixtures during the 2017-18 school year, but it is unlikely that all fixtures will be operational because some schools may require partial pipe replacement to reduce lead levels. **Replacement of drinking fixtures does not currently include drinking fixtures in classrooms. These fixtures will be replaced as part of the 2017 Bond ADA accessibility program.**

**Q. Will any non-drinking fixtures be replaced?**

**A.** Although several non-drinking fixtures exhibit elevated lead, use of these water sources for hand washing, showering, etc. is safe as per Oregon Health Authority, <http://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HealthyEnvironments/DrinkingWater/Monitoring/Documents/health/lead.pdf>

## Kitchens, Gardens and Renovated Schools

**Q: How are school meals being prepared?**

**A:** PPS implemented a protocol to flush water lines daily beginning in October, 2016. This resulted in our kitchens resuming normal operations and safe food preparation.

**Q: Are Roosevelt, Franklin, Grant and Faubion getting new lead-free pipes as part of the Bond-funded renovations?**

**A:** Yes.

**Q: Can produce grown in school gardens (and watered with school water) be safely consumed?**

**A:** Eating fresh garden produce is a healthy choice for all people. School food gardens are acceptable and encouraged by the District to foster further learning opportunities for students as well as continued community engagement and sustainable practices.

Recently, Oregon Health Authority reviewed scientific research about the safety of gardening in soil that could contain lead. The most significant contributors to soil lead concentrations are sources such as lead-based paint chips and dust. The research shows the amount of lead delivered to soil through water is quite small compared to the amount of lead already present at background levels in soil. In general, garden plants do not absorb significant quantities of lead. However, it is important to wash all soil and dust off vegetables and hands after gardening, as soil and dust are the primary potential sources of lead contamination on produce.

Per information from Oregon Health Authority, school gardens may be irrigated with water from hose bibs at schools regardless of lead level readings.  The District encourages running the water from hose bibs for 1-2 minutes prior to irrigating gardens to flush the hose bibs of any standing water.

Produce grown in gardens that is intended to be consumed in the school cafeteria should be initially rinsed outdoors to remove dirt particles.  The food should then be washed thoroughly by Nutrition Services staff with fixtures that are below the PPS standard for lead and prepared for consumption. If the produce will be consumed somewhere on campus other than in the cafeteria, garden programs can make arrangements with the Nutrition Services staff to use sinks outside of food prep times.  If the produce is going off campus, do not wash it with a garden spigot.

The Oregon Department of Education School Garden Food Safety Program recommends that food garden program coordinators possess a state food handler’s card. All students/staff must wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before harvesting food to be served at school. When harvesting, rewash hands after breaks, visiting restrooms, sneezing, coughing, handling trash or money, or anytime hands become soiled. ANY student or staff who are ill should not participate in harvesting so they will not spread bacteria or viruses leading to foodborne illness.

If you are building a new garden, please work with our Project Management staff.

## Lead Testing Plan

**Q. What is the status of PPS lead-in-water testing?**

**A.** The sampling of every cold water outlet in the district during 2016 was completed and all results of the initial “A” sampling have been posted individually [online](http://www.pps.net/Page/5378).

A second “B” sample was also taken and used to help identify the source of lead (pipes vs. fixtures).  An independent third party analyzed all test results, and combined with other information, made recommendations for improvement to the current system including:

* Replacement of drinking and water features
* Permanent removal of all filters
* Partial pipe replacement as needed
* Updating maintenance and testing procedures of all drinking and kitchen fixtures
* Creation of a master water fixture database that tracks maintenance and testing history

Signage has been placed on access doors to all non-drinking water sources (bathrooms, labs, classrooms, etc.) indicating that students and staff should not drink from sinks or any other fixture. Non-drinking uses such as hand-washing and showering is safe.

Lead testing resumed in October 2017 after beginning the replacement of water fixtures for drinking fountains and food preparation kitchen fixtures. The results of these tests will be posted on the PPS Healthy and Safe Schools website as they become available.

**Q. Have outdoor hose spigots and fountains been tested?**

**A:** Cold water faucets that are attached to a PPS building have been tested and results are included in the individual school results.

**Q. Were charter schools tested as well?**

**A:** PPS tested the water in all its buildings. Charter schools co-located in PPS owned school buildings and facilities were tested for water quality this summer and results are posted. Charter schools not housed in a PPS building were not included, but charter school students are able to participate in the lead level screenings.