



Water Quality and Water Testing Frequently Asked Questions

UPDATED March 15, 2017

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: The 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. The health department website www.multco.us/health/lead-poinsoning-prevention provides excellent information and answers about lead information. They also have a hotline for questions 503.988.4000.

Safe Water Distribution

Q. What is the plan for water delivery during the 2016-17 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.

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.

Lead Level Screening

Q. What opportunities did PPS provide for students and staff to get free lead screenings?

A: Last spring and throughout the summer, PPS partnered with Multnomah County and provided families information on the County's free lead level screenings throughout Portland.

Q. Are there any additional opportunities for lead screening?

A: Currently, blood lead testing is available for free 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>.

Q: Where can families learn more details about lead levels and health risks?

A: Multnomah County operates a "lead line" email at leadline@multco.us and a telephone information line at 503-988-4000.

Other Questions

Q: How are school meals being prepared?

A: PPS implemented a protocol to flush water lines in early October, 2016. This resulted our kitchens resuming normal 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 will then be washed thoroughly by Nutrition Services staff with fixtures that are below the EPA 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 testing?

A: The sampling of every cold water outlet in the district has been completed and all results of the initial “A” sampling have been posted individually online. We expect in near future final, detailed reports from TRC for all buildings tested, including a full wrap up analysis, data and corrections to any errors in preliminary reporting. Once those reports are complete we will make them available to all PPS families and staff.

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

- a. Replacement of water fixtures;
- b. Piping replacements;
- c. Removal of all filters;
- d. Updating protocols and procedures to ensure safe operations of all water fixtures such as flushing;
- e. Creation of a master water fixture database that tracks related maintenance history and any measurements.

All drinking fountains have been covered or made inoperable, and replaced by portable water dispensers to ensure that all students and staff have safe drinking water. Protocols were also established to ensure that water used to prepare food in kitchens is safe.

Signage has been placed on access doors to all non-fountain 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 is safe.

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 were able to participate in the lead level screenings.
