

Lead Remains a National Problem that Threatens the Health of All Americans *Common-Sense Federal Actions Can Have Enormous Impact*

The tragedy in Flint, Michigan drew national attention to the issue of lead in drinking water. In April 2014, Flint switched its water supply from Lake Huron to the Flint River. The corrosive river water stripped the protective coating that had built up on the inside of the lead water service line over the years. As a result, high levels of lead leached into Flint's drinking water, resulting in exposure to as many as 8,000 children. Unfortunately, Flint is not the only community at risk of lead exposure from lead service lines. Any home that has a lead service line is at risk when the pipe is disturbed or the water chemistry changes.

Lead is a National Problem

- There is no safe level of lead.
- Lead can harm brain development in young children resulting in learning and behavioral problems and reduced IQ for the rest of their lives.
- CDC estimates **500,000 children** have elevated blood lead levels. (Source: [CDC, 2011](#))
- Children in poor households are **3 times more likely** to have elevated blood lead levels and African-American children are **twice as likely** as white counterparts. (Source: [CDC](#))
- Lead-based paint followed by lead in drinking water are the primary sources of lead exposure today.
- About **34 million homes** have lead-based paint. Almost two-thirds of those homes have lead hazards created when the paint is disturbed or allowed to deteriorate. (Source: [HUD](#))
- Approximately **6.1 million** homes have lead pipes - called lead service lines (LSLs)- that connect the drinking water main in the street to our homes (Source: [AWWA](#)). Most of these homes also have lead-based paint.
- We don't know how many homes have high levels of lead in drinking water. They occur when the protective coating from corrosion control fails when disturbed or the water chemistry changes. These failures often are unpredictable and undetected.

Policy Solutions Can Make a Difference

Children's blood lead levels are down dramatically from the 1990s due to a national strategy of removing lead from consumer products including gasoline, new paint, and plumbing; managing lead paint and pipes in place more effectively to prevent lead exposure; and identifying, investigating and supporting children who have elevated blood lead levels.

Current Policies Have Helped, but Children are Still at Risk

- For lead pipes, widespread contamination of drinking water in Washington, DC; Flint, MI; and Newark, NJ has made clear that the current strategy is flawed because it:
 - Depends too heavily on corrosion control to keep the lead in the pipes and out of water.
 - Discourages replacement of LSLs even though it is cost-effective and permanently eliminates this source of lead.
 - Requires only limited sampling every three years which is insufficient to identify problems.

- Poorly communicates the risk to residents and does not engage the public health community.
- For lead-based paint, the strategy appears sound but standards have not kept up with evidence of harm and compliance is inconsistent, with low income communities at greatest risk.
- A communications disconnect between paint and pipes is misleading to residents. When buying or renting a home, they are told only about the risk from lead-based paint but not whether they have an LSL. Plus they get this information too late to make an informed decision.
- Public health efforts to identify and support children with elevated blood lead levels have faltered due to federal and state funding cuts and inconsistent reporting of problems.

The Solutions

Make Full Lead Service Line Replacement a Top Priority

Ultimately, all LSLs must be replaced to permanently remove this significant and unpredictable source of lead exposure. Until that is done, we need to better manage the system to protect families.

Overhaul the Lead and Copper Rule

In December 2015, EPA's National Drinking Water Advisory Council (NDWAC) provided a roadmap to the agency to overhaul the rule to accomplish this goal. An overhaul should include:

- Requiring utilities to develop and implement a long-term lead service line replacement program beginning with an inventory that assumes a pipe is lead until confirmed otherwise.
- Promoting more frequent sampling so consumers, utilities and regulators better understand the risk.
- Alerting residents and health departments when lead levels are high enough that infant formula made from the drinking water is likely to result in an elevated blood lead level, a level that NDWAC referred to as a "household action level."
- Ensuring homeowners know if their home has a lead service line and provides the public ready access to their utility's LSL replacement plan and water sampling results.

A Cooperative Effort to Accelerate Lead Pipe Replacement

Fixing the lead in drinking water rule alone will not solve the problem. It is a shared responsibility between the utility, the property owner, and the community. Homeowners need to cooperate and support the replacement. Clear and transparent communication among these stakeholders is essential.

The federal government can play an important role in supporting this cooperative effort by:

- Expanding the lead-based paint disclosure, risk assessment, inspection and hazard control program to include lead in drinking water so that families make informed decisions about both paint and pipes.
- Requiring that sellers tell prospective homebuyers whether the home has an LSL or not.
- Providing residents, especially low-income residents, financial assistance to replace their portion of the LSL – as certain communities across the country have done.
- Updating EPA and HUD lead-based paint standards to ensure they are based on the latest research and are consistent with CDC's guidance.
- Restoring full funding to CDC's and HUD's lead and healthy homes program to support state childhood surveillance programs and lead hazard control for pipes and paint in low income housing.
- Providing utilities access to a fully-funded loan program to replace LSLs without undermining other critical water infrastructure projects.