Frequently Asked Questions
MassDEP Expanded Assistance Program for Lead in School and Childcare Facility Drinking Water

Updated 1/3/2023

Introduction

This fact sheet provides answers to questions about the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)'s Expanded Assistance Program for testing and technical assistance for addressing lead in school and early education and care facility (EECF) drinking water.

1. What is lead and why is it a concern in drinking water?

Lead is a tasteless odorless metal and is one of the top environmental health threats to children. Lead can be inhaled from the air, absorbed through the skin, or ingested by eating food grown in lead contaminated soil, chips of lead-based paint, or drinking lead-contaminated water. Over time, exposure to lead can affect a child's growth, behavior, and learning ability. The greatest risk of lead exposure is to infants, young children, and pregnant women.

Lead can leach into drinking water from lead service lines that connect a home or building to the water main in the street, or from other plumbing materials in a home or building that may contain lead such as pipes, solder, fittings, and fixtures (i.e., faucet or bubbler). Source water is rarely the cause of elevated lead levels in drinking water. Corrosive water (i.e., acidic water with a low pH) can exacerbate the leaching of lead from plumbing materials into the drinking water.

To learn more about lead exposure and health concerns see MassDEP's Is there lead in my tap water? Fact Sheet

2. What is the Expanded Assistance Program and who is eligible to participate?

The MassDEP's Expanded Assistance Program provides free comprehensive testing and technical assistance to public and private schools and public and private childcare facilities that have not previously participated in the assistance program to assess lead levels in drinking water. The assistance includes the following components:

- Development and implementation of a facility sampling plan;
- Free analysis of drinking water samples for lead;
- Interpretation of results; and
- Identification of follow-up and remedial actions to address elevated lead levels.

3. Why should a school or childcare facility participate in the Program?

There are many benefits to participating in the Expanded Assistance Program. Lead is tasteless and odorless, so the only way to identify its presence is to test for it. Testing through the Expanded

Assistance Program provides eligible schools and childcare facilities with extensive financial and technical assistance throughout the process. The cost of lead analysis can be up to $30 per water sample, and the program collects two samples per fixture. For an average school with 30 fixtures, that is a savings of approximately $1,800. Additionally, by conducting comprehensive sampling and informing communities about the results, schools and childcare facilities can demonstrate their commitment to their students' health and wellbeing. Participating facilities are also offered additional remediation assistance to help address elevated lead levels found through testing. For more information see Questions 9 - 11.

4. How does a school or childcare facility apply for the free lead testing?

Eligible schools and childcare facilities are invited to apply to the program by filling out the application at https://script.google.com/macros/s/AKfycbyr_U8wEMrA-Q2XifkK4l58x4GDtYrItvpKIKUAhSxpw9pSZtA/exec

Completed applications are reviewed on a rolling basis.

5. How does the water sample collection and analysis process work?

MassDEP has partnered with the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (UMass) to implement the program. Once the facility has been accepted to the program, a technical assistance provider from UMass will contact the facility to create a sampling plan and schedule the sampling. Depending on the type and/or size of the participating facility, the UMass technical assistance provider may either collect the samples themselves, or guide the facility personnel through conducting the sampling on their own. Sampling instructions and guidance will be provided.

Once sampling is complete, the technical assistance provider or facility personnel will provide the samples to a MassDEP certified laboratory for the analysis. Instructions for mailing or delivering the samples to the laboratory will be provided.

6. How many samples are collected as part of the program and what type of water fixtures are tested?

The number of collected samples varies based on the type and/or size of the facility and the number and types of fixtures (outlets) at the facility. The number of fixtures sampled can range from two at a small family-based childcare to over 50 at a school. The UMass technical assistance provider will develop a sampling plan which includes testing at all fixtures used for drinking, food preparation, and medical purposes. These fixtures may include water fountains, kitchen sinks, classroom sinks, nurses' office sinks, kitchen kettles, etc.

Testing conducted through the Program includes two samples collected and analyzed at each fixture; a first draw (primary) sample and a second draw (flush) sample collected after running the water for 30 seconds.

7. How does a participating facility receive their lead testing results and are there resources to help understand them?

Results from the lead testing will be sent directly to the facility, available on the LCCA Program Management Tool, and publicly available on the EEA Data Portal.

The UMass technical assistance provider will contact the facility to assist with results interpretation and discuss any next steps.

8. What is required of a participating facility if lead is found in the drinking water?

There are currently no federal or state requirements for a school or childcare facility to take action as a result of detecting lead in drinking water. However, MassDEP strongly recommends that facilities take follow-up actions to reduce lead levels in drinking water to the lowest levels possible, and to resample following remediation to see if lead levels have decreased. See Question 9 for suggested remedial actions based on lead levels. Once follow-up actions are taken, the facility is encouraged to report their actions through the online LCCA Program Management Tool and provide information to their staff, students, parents, and other community members about the results and remediation actions.

9. What are some effective remediation actions if the drinking water has elevated lead levels?

Based on the levels of lead detected in drinking water, a facility may take the following suggested actions to reduce lead levels:

Results	Actions
If the lead level is between 1 ppb and 15 ppb	**Remediate Fixtures:** Take steps to address elevated levels of lead, including routine flushing, fixture/piping replacement, and/or posting signage.
If the lead level is above 15 ppb	**Shut-Off Fixtures**: Shut off or disconnect fixtures used for drinking, food preparation, and medical purposes until permanent remediation actions are taken.

For additional information on follow-up actions see the Lead Testing Follow-up Actions Chart.

10. What is the School Water Improvement Grant (SWIG) Program?

Facilities that participate in the Expanded Assistance Program and detect lead in one or more samples may be eligible to receive a grant to purchase and install filtered water bottle filling stations to replace problem fixtures. The goal of the SWIG program is to reduce lead in school drinking water to the lowest levels possible. The Massachusetts Clean Water Trust and MassDEP are offering the SWIG program to further encourage public and private schools and non-residential childcare facilities to test their drinking water and remediate detectable lead exceedances by providing grants to install filtered water bottle filling stations.

For more information on the SWIG program see: https://www.mass.gov/service-details/about-swig

11. Is there any remediation help provided specifically to family childcare facilities that are not eligible for the SWIG program?

Family based childcare facilities that participate in the program may receive a free donated Brita water filter dispenser on completion of the program. The filter is certified by the National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) to reduce lead levels in drinking water. The filters may be used as an additional tool as part of an overall strategy to reduce lead exposure. Certain filters, if properly used and maintained, may be over 99% effective at reducing levels of lead.

The company that donated the pitcher filters is not affiliated with MassDEP. This offer neither endorses nor recommends any particular company or product, nor should the offer of this product to eligible childcare programs be implicitly or expressly construed to constitute such an endorsement or recommendation. Users are encouraged to carefully read and follow all manufacturer's instructions for the proper use of the pitcher filter for maximum effectiveness. The manufacturer's specifications for the pitcher filter being provided meet current State drinking water standards for lead in drinking water, if properly used and maintained. MassDEP has not independently verified the accuracy of the manufacturer's specifications, however, and makes no representations nor warranties regarding the use or effectiveness of the pitcher filter provided, even if properly used. Use of the pitcher filter shall be at the sole risk and responsibility of the user.

If your business or organization is interested in supporting this effort through similar filter donations, please email program.director-dwp@mass.gov with "Filter Donation" in the subject line.

12. Will MassDEP collect any additional samples after the initial samples?

This program provides one round of sampling to eligible facilities. However, MassDEP strongly encourages facilities to conduct follow up sampling of specific fixtures after any remediation actions are taken, and for all fixtures in a facility every five years, to reassess the lead levels in the drinking water.

13. How do local water departments assist schools and childcares with lead in drinking water?

A town's local water department or Public Water System (PWS) may sample a school or childcare facility's drinking water as part of its required lead and copper monitoring. All Community PWSs are required by MassDEP to collect lead and copper samples from at least two schools or early education and care facilities that they serve in each sampling period. Additionally, starting in October 2024, schools and childcare facilities may receive an offer from their PWS to conduct free lead analysis of the facility's drinking water as part of new requirements. PWSs may also help reduce lead in the drinking water of facilities they serve by implementing effective corrosion control measures and/or replacing lead service lines in their distribution system. For more information on PWSs and lead see: https://www.mass.gov/guides/is-there-lead-in-my-tap-water#-rules-&-regulations-

For more information, visit:

MassDEP Expanded Assistance Program for Lead in School and Child Care Center Drinking Water: https://www.mass.gov/service-details/technical-assistance-for-lead-in-school-and-child-care-center-drinking-water

Lead and Copper in School Drinking Water Results: https://eeaonline.eea.state.ma.us/portal#!/search/leadandcopper

Expanded Assistance Program StoryMap: https://mass-eoeea.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=c8f635cf3a4b443998245f6045b4c013

LCCA Framework for Developing a School Lead Sampling Program: http://leadandcoppercontrolact.donahue-institute.org/LCCA_Framework_4.26.18/story_html5.html

LCCA Program Management Tool: https://script.google.com/macros/s/AKfycbxP99K-Cd5B3ioE7nswn0peOEndcGrXwVk6zJcS5iHxzGO55B1k/exec

Follow-Up Steps for Lead Detections: https://www.mass.gov/guides/follow-up-steps-for-schools-and-eecf-with-lead-detections-over-1-ppb-or-copper-results-over-the-action-level

SWIG Program Information: https://www.mass.gov/doc/swig-program-description/download