

FAQ – Drinking Water & Lead In Schools

Lead exposure in schools has recently become a topic of concern in communities around the state. PACE is providing its members with resources about lead exposure because the health and safety of our students, staff and community are of the highest priority for educational leaders. As many of our schools have recently discovered, there are currently no federal or state requirements to monitor lead levels unless schools have their own water supply.

All school buildings¹, except those who have their own water supply, are exempt from lead testing requirements because they are usually served by city water systems. Municipal water systems test the water before it is distributed to the community, including the schools. If the district's drinking water comes from a municipal water system, operators of the system will have more information on the source of the water and whether there are any contaminants. As a result, many districts and schools have not regularly tested for lead or other contaminants.

Districts need to remember that when evaluating what steps to take in considering testing or remediation they need to include all buildings owned by the district in their deliberations. This includes buildings that may currently be leased and/or rented to other entities.

SHOULD SCHOOLS TEST?

Some districts have a policy on testing drinking water, neither state or federal law requires districts to have a policy. Consequently there are no recommended policies at this time.

If your district is not on municipal water but has its own water supply there are specific monitoring and testing requirements the district should be following. If you have any questions about those requirements contact your local county health department or the State of Oregon Drinking Water program at (971) 673-0405.

For districts that rely on municipal water; if the school has any reason to believe that there may be heightened levels of lead in the school water system, has had parent requests for testing, or have not tested the water for some time, a district may decide to test its water system.

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) has provided this guidance for districts:

[Plan for Reducing Student Exposure](#)

For advice on how to test for lead in drinking water contact: OHA Drinking Water Services at (971) 673-0405.

¹ Reference in this FAQ to District and/or school includes education service districts, K-12 schools and public charter schools.

The Oregon Department of Education recently released guidance and is recommending that all districts test for lead during summer 2016. At this point, no state funding has been allocated to cover testing costs or any of the remediation measures that may be recommended based on those tests. Conversations have begun amongst legislators regarding legislation in the upcoming legislative session requiring schools to test for lead.

On June 23, 2016 the Governor asked the Oregon Department of Education to adopt a new administrative rule (OAR 581-022-2223) and revise existing administrative rule OAR 581-024-0275. The proposed rules include the following:

Development of a Healthy and Safe Facilities Plan which must include:

- a. Identification of the person responsible for maintaining and implementing the health and safety plan;
- b. Plan for testing for elevated levels of radon;
- c. Plan to test for and reduce exposure to lead in accordance with OHA's Public Health Division's and U.S. EPA's recommendations;
- d. Plan to improve air quality in accordance with the EPA's recommendation's;
- e. Plan to test, monitor and improve ambient air quality; and
- f. Plan to reduce exposures to toxics from hazardous waste sites in accordance with OHA's Public Health Division recommendations.

[Health & Safe Facilities Plan – Proposed Rules](#)

A list of OHA-accredited drinking water laboratories can be found at the following:

[Lab Lists & Reporting Information](#)

WHAT IF WE FIND SOMETHING?

If your district chooses to test, it will be important to develop a plan to communicate the results of those tests to staff, parents and the general public. Any levels above the current standard will require a plan of remediation which will also require swift communication with staff, parents and the community. Any communication should include information as to what the immediate steps and/or actions the district is taking to address the heightened lead levels (e.g., flushing of the water system, shutting portions of the system down, provision of alternative sources of water etc.).

An excellent resource is the Environmental Protection Agency's 3Ts for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water in Schools which can be found at the following link:

[EPA: 3 T for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water](#)

[Salem-Keizer SD – Sample Parent Letter](#)

The EPA resource provides guidance on “Training, Testing and Telling,” (including sample press letters and press releases for communicating with the public).

If you have individuals threatening legal action in conjunction with the district's decisions related to lead testing, please contact **PACE preloss at 800-578-6722** or pacepreloss@osba.org for consultation.

RESOURCES FOR STAFF, PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

Lead poisoning can cause serious health effects, particularly in children. Lead can come from a variety of sources; water is only one possible source. The only way to definitively know if there has been lead exposure is by blood test. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) provides information on lead and how to prevent lead exposure.

See: [CDC – Resources for Parents](#)

The Oregon Department of Public Health also provides information on lead:

[Lead Poisoning: Signs & Symptoms](#)

COVERAGE FOR TESTING AND REMEDIATION

PACE, or any commercial property carrier of which we are aware, does not pay for the cost of testing for lead in water systems, testing of students/employees and will not reimburse/cover the cost to remediate lead from the water supply if elevated levels are found. Please contact your local agent of record if you have any questions about any coverages that may be available.