FAQ: Drinking Water Test Results for Oregon Schools

November 30, 2016

As part of a statewide plan for reducing lead in school drinking water, the Oregon Health Authority recommended in June 2016 that all school districts test their water for lead following EPA 3T Guidance. Results are available online at healthoregon.org/schoolwaterdata. If results for a school are not listed, please visit the school district website. Schools continue to test, fix problems and retest to assure school water quality. Make sure to follow progress with your school district to stay up to date.

How do I read the test results?

Drinking water test results are technical and can be confusing. Sample test results are shown below with guidance on how to read the results. Keep in mind that many different labs did the testing, so not all results will look the same. However, they usually show the same key information.

The most important information is the **Result** for a sample location. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends schools take action if a faucet tests above **20 ppb** for lead. (Note: Some labs list the lead action level as 15 ppb, but this is for public water systems, not schools. It is different because the sampling process is different. For more information, see page 12 in the EPA 3T Guidance.)

Sample test result

Results will look different depending on the lab

			1	2	3	4	5
Sample location	**Sample ID**	**Date Analyzed**	**Analyte**	**Results**	**EPA Action Level**	**MRL**	**Units**
Boys bathroom	#12345-1	9/01/2016	Lead	13	20	0.1	ppb
Kitchen	#12345-2	9/01/2016	Lead	27	20	0.1	ppb

1 **Analyte** – The name of the contaminant that was tested for. All results will include testing for lead. Results may also include copper because some labs routinely test for lead and copper together.

2 **Results** – The measured value of the contaminant at the sample location.

3 **EPA Action Level** – The highest acceptable result according to the Environmental Protection Agency. You may also see this listed as "EPA Limit" or "MCL." For schools, the EPA action level for lead is **20 ppb**.

4 **MRL** – "Minimum reporting limit," the lowest detectable concentration that can be measured by the test.

5 **Units** – The unit of measurement for the test result. This varies depending on the lab.

ppb – parts per billion	**ppm** – parts per million
µg/L – microgram per liter	**mg/L** – milligrams per liter

20 ppb = 20 µg/L = .02 ppm = .02 mg/L

What should a school do to address faucets that test high for lead?

There are several actions that schools may take to address lead in drinking water.

- **Immediate short-term solutions** include flushing the pipe system, providing bottled water, and shutting off problem outlets.
- **Permanent solutions** include replacing plumbing components that contain lead, installing treatment systems at the tap, using bottled water, and permanently shutting off problem outlets.
- Other prevention measures include only using cold water for food and beverage preparation, running the water before drinking from taps, and posting signs where the water should not be consumed.

How does lead get into school drinking water?

Lead can get into drinking water through corrosion of plumbing materials that contain lead, such as lead pipes, lead solder and brass faucets and valves. The amount of lead in the water depends on the amount of time the water has contact with lead, the amount of lead in the plumbing, and the corrosiveness of the water.

For more information about how lead gets in school drinking water, see page 7 of the EPA 3T Guidance.

How common is lead poisoning in Oregon kids?

Data on lead poisoning in Oregon children are available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In Oregon, the **leading cause of childhood lead poisoning is exposure to lead-based paint**, either through lead dust created by renovation work or deteriorating paint, both inside and outside older homes and buildings. Other sources of lead include:

- Hobbies, including working with stained glass or making fishing weights or ammunition
- Contaminated toys, jewelry or other consumer products (often from foreign sources)
- Traditional medicines and cosmetics (often from foreign sources)
- On the job exposures, including building renovation (note that children can be exposed to lead from the work clothes of parents)
- Lead in the diet from contaminated foods or pottery with lead in the glaze
- Contaminated soil
- Plumbing and plumbing fixtures

Should I have my child tested for lead poisoning?

If you are concerned about your child's exposure to lead for any reason, talk with your health care provider.