

Monday, Feb. 13, 2017

Arlington Schools and Health Dept. Issue Notification About Lead Levels in High School Plumbing Fixtures

ARLINGTON -- The Arlington Public Schools report that plumbing fixture changes are currently underway after voluntary testing at Arlington High School revealed higher than acceptable levels of lead in five fixtures.

The town recently received a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) to conduct water sampling in all public school buildings in town to assess the drinking water for lead and copper. During testing, five of the 28 water taps tested at Arlington High School had lead levels that exceeded the Massachusetts Action Level for lead in drinking water at schools.

The Massachusetts Action Level for lead is 15 parts per billion (ppb). Three hand washing sinks came back slightly above the level (15.4 to 19 ppb) while a mop sink and drinking fountain came back at a higher level (20-58.7 ppb).

Fixture Location	Lead ppb (1 st draw)	Lead ppb (30 second flush)
Nurse's office- hand wash sink	16.4	1.11
Room 213 Cooking- food prep sink	15.3	3.11
Athletic Office-hand wash sink	19	1.32
Rm 119 Preschool-mop sink	20	Non-detect
Rm 110 Preschool-fountain	58.7	Non-detect

Lead is not believed to be in the water source but rather in plumbing fixtures in the building, resulting in an increase in the lead content in tap water.

With older fixtures, lead levels in the water are highest during the first draw on a plumbing fixture but diminish with use throughout the day. At each plumbing fixture tested, there were two samples taken. The first sample was the first draw of water for the day and the second sample was after a 30-second flush. All of the samples after the 30-second flush came back well below the Massachusetts Action Level.

This clearly indicates that the age and condition of the fixtures is the primary cause of the lead, and officials believe that once the fixtures are replaced, there will no longer be an issue.

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Exposure to lead is a concern because lead is a toxic metal that has a range of adverse health effects primarily in young children under the age of 6 if they drink the water. Hand washing does not expose the body to the dangers of lead.

The Arlington Public School Department has taken the following steps to address the issue of lead in the water:

1. All plumbing fixtures with lead levels over the Action Level have been removed, and each fixture will be replaced with a safe new fixture.
2. The schools have developed a sampling plan to conduct additional testing at additional plumbing fixtures (faucets, water fountains, etc.) where students and staff get water for drinking, beverage preparation and cooking.
3. The schools have installed a reverse osmosis water filtration system at the preschool, daycare center, and nurse's office, all in the high school, which removes lead, copper and other unwanted items from the water.
4. Once the new fixtures are installed, they will be retested for lead and copper to ensure that the problem has been rectified.

"The water supply in our school buildings is a vital issue and something that we take very seriously," Superintendent Kathleen Bodie said. "We are moving immediately in partnership with the MassDEP and the Arlington Board of Health to further protect the health of students, faculty and staff, and we are confident that the problem has been addressed."

Tests were also conducted at all seven elementary schools and the Ottoson Middle School. The results came back well below the Massachusetts Action Levels for lead and copper.

The water system at the High School is not unlike water systems found in other buildings in town. Older plumbing systems and fixtures can contain lead pipes or solder that can allow lead to enter tap water. Please visit: arlingtonma.gov/health to find out more about health effects of lead and how to limit exposure.

Following these test results, Arlington is seeking to expand its voluntary testing of water fixtures in public buildings and will make additional replacements where necessary.

If anyone has any questions about this announcement, they are encouraged to contact the Arlington Board of Health 781-316-3170 or Superintendent Bodie's office at 781-316-3502.