

November 8, 2019



The issue of lead in water has been a media issue in recent days and we wanted to assure parents and guardians that the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB) strictly adheres to Ontario Regulation 243/07 to ensure safe drinking water is available to our students and staff.

Since 2007, the Ontario government has been requiring child care centres and schools to flush the plumbing in their facilities and test their drinking water for lead. Flushing has been shown to reduce lead levels in drinking water fixtures. By flushing plumbing and fixtures, water that may have come in contact with lead plumbing is replaced with fresh water. How often a facility has to flush their plumbing and fixtures depends on several factors including the age of the plumbing, previous lead test results or if a device that removes lead, such as a filter, has been installed on a fixture.

The Ontario drinking water quality standard for lead is 10 micrograms per litre (0.01 mg/L). Health Canada recently changed its standard to 5 micrograms per litre.

If a child care centre or school gets a drinking water test result that is above the standard for lead, the local Medical Officer of Health will assign corrective actions to the facility and it is the facility's responsibility to ensure those actions are carried out. The Ministry of the Environment will follow up with the facility operator and local Medical Officer of Health if necessary. These local processes have been in place since 2007.

Lead is a naturally occurring element. Lead has many industrial uses and has been found in water systems since the late 1800s. It is also present in soil, food and indoor dust. Over the past few decades, exposure to lead has significantly decreased due to restrictions in the use of lead in gasoline, paint and solder.

Ontario's surface and groundwater generally does not contain lead. If lead does occur naturally, the concentrations are typically extremely low and below the drinking water standard for lead. Where there are concentrations of lead in drinking water above the standard, the likely cause is from the lead pipes servicing the premises, lead solder used in the plumbing, or fixtures containing high percentages of lead. Lead pipe service connections have been used to deliver water from distribution pipes since the late 1800s. Older buildings (generally those built before the mid-1950s) are more likely to have lead connections. By 1990, the amount of lead in solder that could be used in drinking water plumbing was substantially reduced.

The amount of lead leaching into drinking water from these components depends largely on the chemical characteristics of the water. In certain circumstances, extended contact between standing water and the components can cause the lead to be released from the pipes. When the tap is turned on, water that has been standing in the pipes may have accumulated lead levels higher than Ontario's standard for lead. Flushing has been shown to reduce lead levels in drinking water fixtures. That is where flushing comes in; by flushing plumbing and fixtures, water that may have come in contact with lead plumbing is replaced with fresh water.

The water to all Board facilities is provided through the water main connection from the Region of Peel, Town of Caledon and the Town of Orangeville.

DPCDSB Drinking Water Testing Process

The DPCDSB retains an outside contractor to conduct water testing for lead from drinking water sources in all DPCDSB schools in Peel Region and Dufferin County. All water sampling is conducted in accordance with Ontario Regulation 243/07.

Under the sampling program, the contractor has been testing all faucets in child care centre areas, as well as all drinking fountains, faucets and bottle fill fixtures in our elementary and secondary schools, and all faucets in kitchen preparation areas in our secondary schools. The following describes the testing process:

- Two (2) samples are collected from each faucet to be tested; the first is a standing sample and the second is a flushed sample
- A standing sample is collected following a minimum six (6) hour period where the plumbing system is not in use
- Following collection of standing samples, the entire school plumbing system is flushed for a minimum of five (5) minutes
- Following the flush process, the plumbing system is not to be used for at least 30 minutes
- After the 30-minute standing period, the flushed samples are collected
- The time, date and location of each sample is recorded for all standing and flushed samples, and all sampling bottles are labelled and placed in separate plastic bags
- The samples are transported to an accredited lab, licensed by the Ministry of the Environment, to be analyzed for lead content.

Information collected by the contractor has been shared with DPCDSB staff. As noted above, corrective actions, as required, have been followed by DPCDSB in accordance with Ontario Regulation 243/07.

The DPCDSB posts water testing results annually on the board's website. This information can be found in the Planning and Operations link under the About Us tab at www.dpcdsb.org.

For additional information

- Health Canada – Lead and Human Health: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/contaminants/lead-plomb/asked_questions-questions_posees_e.html
- Ontario Ministry of the Environment – Drinking Water Information: www.ontario.ca/drinkingwater
- Ontario Ministry of the Environment Public Information Centre: 1-800-565-4923.

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