



Genesee County Board of Commissioners

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September 29, 2015

Public Health Advisory for People Using the Flint City Water Supply with the Flint River as the Source

Lead is a powerful neurotoxin, which means exposure to lead can damage the brain. It can also injure other soft tissues and organs; interfere with the formation of blood, and exposure to enough lead can be fatal. Both children and adults are vulnerable to lead's health effects.

Common Health Effects on Children:

- Brain damage resulting in IQ loss, learning disabilities, hyperactivity, inability to concentrate, and/or behavior problems
- Stunted growth
- Hearing problems

Common Health Effects on Adults:

- Hypertension
- Anemia
- Reduced sperm count
- Increased risk of miscarriages

Young children are most vulnerable to lead's effects because prior to age six, their brain and central nervous system are still forming and easily susceptible to damage. For an adult to suffer significant health effects, exposure to lead would have to be sustained and more intense. Most adults who are affected by lead have been exposed in an occupational setting, such as working as a house painter or in a battery recycling plant.

Pregnant women are at special risk because the lead they absorb crosses the placenta and enters the fetus.

It's important to remember that there is no known safe level of lead in a human body. Experts now use a reference level of 5 micrograms per deciliter to identify children with blood lead levels that are much higher than most children's levels. This new level is based on the U.S. population of children ages 1-5 years who are in the highest 2.5% of children when tested for lead in their blood.

-COMMISSIONERS-

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Lead in water can contribute to a child's blood lead level. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, which regulates municipal water supplies, has assured us that the water leaving the Flint Water Plant meets all Federal and state requirements. The City of Flint has a documented problem with lead in its drinking water due to service and household lines that may contain lead or lead solder which can leach lead because of the corrosivity of the water since changing to the Flint River as the source supply. Generally, those who are most vulnerable to lead's health effects from exposure to unfiltered tap water are the very youngest children. For this reason, if you are not sure about the lead content in your tap water, it's best to either use a filter that has been found to be effective for reducing or eliminating lead, or to use bottled water instead. Water filters should be National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) certified to remove lead and meet ANSI standard 53. If these options are not available to you, then it's best to let the water run for at least five minutes before using it for either drinking or cooking purposes. Always use cold water instead of hot water for drinking and cooking.

It's best to avoid using tap water for mixing infant formula unless you can assure your water is lead free.

Other Exposure:

When leaded gasoline was in widespread use in this country, the lead came out the tail pipe and was deposited in yards near the roads. That lead may still be in those yards. In addition, lead paint continues to be a major source of childhood lead poisoning and can be found in homes built before 1978 when lead paint was banned in the U.S. and may be a hazard inside and outside the home especially where paint is worn or flaking.

There are many other potential sources of lead exposure, including:

- "Home remedies" and cosmetics imported from other countries
- Tamarind or chili-based candies from Mexico
- Stained glass windows
- Fishing sinkers
- Firing ranges
- Old, deteriorated mini-blinds
- Bean pots and painted ceramics
- Crystal decanters
- Lead crystal glassware

Since no safe level has been identified it is in everyone's interest to reduce exposure to lead as much as possible. Recommendations on ways to reduce lead exposure can be found on the Genesee County Health Department website www.gchd.us and Center for Disease Control and Prevention website.

Recent data provided by Hurley Hospital researchers has indicated that a significant increase in blood lead levels has occurred in children since the switch to Flint River water. The county Health Officer has requested that the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) provide to the County specific data to support its claim that state data is more comprehensive and does not show a significant increase. To date, the MDHHS has failed to confirm the geographic area included in their findings. We want to assure the state data is specific to the boundaries of the City of Flint, and not Flint addresses which would include addresses in areas outside of the City of Flint. These areas, such as Flint Township, that obtain their water from the Detroit Water Authority and would, therefore, not be representative of Flint River water as the water source. The County is prepared to take further action if the State fails to provide the requested data by September 30, 2015. Further action could include a request for outside independent evaluation of the data and to declare a Public Health Emergency in Flint.

COUNTY OF GENESEE

BY: 

Date: 9-29-15

Jamie Curtis, Chairperson
Board of Commissioners

GENESEE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

BY: 

Date: 9-29-15

Mark Valacak, M.P.H.
Health Officer