

City of White Bear Lake Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Is our water safe to drink?

Your drinking water comes from a groundwater source: four wells ranging from 476 to 970 feet deep that draw water from the Prairie Du Chien-Jordan, Jordan and Mount Simon aquifers. The water coming out of these wells continues to be safe for drinking. The water drawn from the wells is processed at the City's Water Treatment plant where EPA recommended levels of a chloride disinfectant and fluoride are added. The water is also softened at the Treatment Plant, eliminating the need for in-home water softeners.

Lead level exceedances in the home would be derived through an old service line on your property (pre-1940) which connects your home to the City's water main, or the internal plumbing of a home or building. Most homes built before 1986 contain copper plumbing with lead soldering.

What actions should I be taking?

The Minnesota Department of Health recommends taking these four actions to minimize levels in residential tap water:

1. **Let the water run** before using it for drinking or cooking. If you do not have a lead service line, let the water run for 30-60 seconds. If you have a lead service line, let the water run for 3-5 minutes. The more time water has been sitting in your pipes, the more lead it may contain.
 - Unless your home was built before 1940, or is on a lot that once had a home built before 1940, it is very unlikely that your property has a lead service line. You can find out if you have a lead service line by contacting a plumber or by reading: [Do you have lead pipes in your home?](#)
 - Ways to let the water run before using it for drinking or cooking:
 - Do household tasks like showering or running the dishwasher first
 - Collect tap water for cleaning or watering plants
 - Make sure you let the water run from individual faucets for a short time before using them for drinking or cooking.
 - Consider keeping a container of drinking water in the refrigerator to reduce how often you need to let the water run.
2. **Use cold water** for drinking, making food, and making baby formula. Hot water releases more lead from pipes than cold water. Boiling water does not reduce lead levels and may actually increase them.
3. **Test your water.** The only way to know if lead has been reduced by letting it run is to check with a test. If letting the water run does not reduce lead, consider other options to reduce your exposure.
4. **Treat your water** or find an alternative source if a test shows your water has high levels of lead after you let the water run. You can learn more about water treatment options at [Home Water Treatment](#). **This is NOT the same as water softening.** White Bear Lake homes do not need a water softener, as the water is softened through the City's treatment process.

When did you find out about the lead situation?

The Minnesota Department of Health informed us that 4 of 30 residences tested for lead in drinking water had exceeded the federal action level of 15 parts per billion. We immediately notified those four residents of the elevated results. Because more than 10 percent of residences tested above the action level, we are taking additional action, including conducting more tests and informing our community.

What is the action level?

The Environmental Protection Agency has an action level of 15 parts of lead per billion parts of water (ppb) for public water systems. A public water system has to take actions to reduce the amount of lead in the water if more than 10 percent of the water samples have lead levels over 15 ppb. This is an action level; there is no safe level of lead in water.

How is the lead getting in our water?

Lead can get into drinking water after it leaves the treatment plant as it passes through your household plumbing system. Homes built before 1940 may have lead service lines that connect them to public water. Plumbing systems built before 1986 may have lead parts. New “lead free” pipes and plumbing parts may still contain 0.25% lead. Brass parts may also contain some lead. Note that many faucets are made of brass even if they do not have a “brass” color. The amount of lead that gets into drinking water depends on many factors, such as the amount of lead in plumbing materials and water usage.

Lead is rarely found in natural sources of water such as rivers and lakes or underground aquifers.

What are other sources of lead?

You may be in contact with lead through paint, dust, soil, food, hobbies, or your job. **The most common way for Minnesotans to come in contact with lead is through lead-based paint found in homes built before 1978.** Visit [Lead Poisoning Prevention: Common Sources](#) to learn about how to reduce your contact with lead from sources other than your drinking water.

What are the health effects of lead?

Lead can cause serious health problems if too much enters your body from drinking water or other sources. It can cause damage to the brain and kidneys, and can interfere with the production of red blood cells that carry oxygen to all parts of your body.

The greatest risk of lead exposure is to infants, young children, and pregnant women. Scientists have linked the effects of lead on the brain with lowered IQ in children.

Adults with kidney problems and high blood pressure can be affected by low levels of lead more than healthy adults. Lead can be stored in the bones, and it can be released later in life. During pregnancy, the child receives lead from the mother's bones, which may affect brain development.

What are you doing about it?

The City of White Bear Lake will continue to maintain its water system and provide its customers high quality water. This is accomplished through its rigorous maintenance program including annual maintenance of our treatment plant, which provides softening at the source, conducting regular distribution system flushing, and routine repairs as needed. The City also completes a comprehensive assessment of its water system during its annual street reconstruction projects, which includes reviewing each water service for the existence of lead pipe and joints. In addition to system maintenance, regular testing of the water for over 100 contaminants, including lead, will continue. Each year, the City's releases a Consumer Confidence Report (CCR), which summarizes the quality of water provided to its utility customers and includes information on how to protect the consumer from contaminants such as lead.

Should I use a filter or bottled water?

We recommend testing your water first. The only way to know if lead has been reduced by letting it run is to check with a test.

If the test shows your water has high levels of lead after you let the water run, then we recommend treating your water or finding an alternative source for drinking and cooking. You can learn more about water treatment options at [Home Water Treatment](#). **This is NOT the same as water softening.**

Should I boil my water?

No. Boiling water does not reduce lead levels and may actually increase them.

Is this the same situation as Flint or Newark?

No. In Flint, the source of drinking water changed. They were getting water that had corrosion control treatment from the city of Detroit and then switched to water from the Flint River that did not have corrosion control. Flint staff were inexperienced in the more complex treatment needed and the city was under emergency management. The lead release was widespread throughout the city and included other contaminants and issues such as Legionella. Flint is an older city with a large number of lead service lines and older homes.

In Newark, corrosion control at the treatment plant failed and widespread lead release occurred throughout the city. Newark has been in exceedance since 2017. Newark, like Flint, has a large number of lead service lines and older homes.

In White Bear Lake, we receive our water from stable, protected groundwater sources and provide softening to our residences to reduce the need for home water softening. We have not had any recent source water changes or treatment changes. Our staff has many years of experience with White Bear Lake's water treatment and distribution system.

Elevated lead results have only been found in 4 out of 30 samples and in the history of our lead testing we have never had an exceedance of the lead action limit. We have an excellent overall compliance record that we share with you annually in our consumer confidence report.

Is this related to Water Gremlin's operations?

No. There is no way for lead contamination from the Water Gremlin facility to get into White Bear Lake's drinking water wells or distribution system. Our drinking water wells are deep and far away from the Water Gremlin site.

Do I have lead pipes?

Lead pipes were not used for service lines after 1940. Many homes built before 1940 have since replaced their service lines. However, if you are uncertain, there is a very helpful, step-by-step video that shows you how to check at <https://apps.npr.org/find-lead-pipes-in-your-home/en/#intro> or click on the following hyperlink:

[Do you have lead pipes in your home?](#)

If so, can the city remove my lead pipes?

Service lines are the responsibility of the property owner. The City's Building Department can provide you with a list of contractors licensed in the City of White Bear Lake to do this work, 651-429-8518.

Do I need a home treatment system?

People have a right to decide what is best for themselves and their family, and you may choose to install home water treatment. This is not the same as a home water softener. White Bear Lake municipal water is softened at the Treatment Plant and **does not need additional softening** at the home.

Be aware that some water treatment companies may use deceptive sales pitches or inaccurate water quality testing to sell home water treatment units. For example, tests for lead in drinking water should be done at the tap you're drinking from, in a specific way, so that they represent the water you're consuming. Learn more at [Beware of Water Treatment Scams](#).

How do I test my water for lead?

You will need to contact a certified laboratory to arrange for having your water tested and pay for the testing. You can search for certified laboratories that test for lead on the Minnesota Department of Health website at [Search for Accredited Laboratories](#) (<https://eldo.web.health.state.mn.us/public/accreditedlabs/labsearch.seam>)

Can I get tested for lead?

Talk to your doctor about whether a blood lead test is right for you. Adults may get blood lead testing if they are at risk for lead exposure through work or pregnant with at least one lead exposure risk factor.

Additional background on lead

Lead occurs naturally and has been used in many products around the world—going all the way back to at least the Roman Empire. As lead has been studied over the years, we keep identifying additional ways that it is toxic. Levels that were once considered safe are now dealt with as a medical emergency. The EPA continues to research lead to decide if more actions are needed. For public water systems, a law passed in 1986 restricts how much lead can be used in plumbing parts. In 2014, the 1986 law was made even stricter. Some plumbing parts still have very small amounts of lead in them. Other parts are now made of materials other than lead; one of those materials is copper. Like lead, copper can also dissolve into water, and too much copper can be bad for you.

The EPA has an action level of 15 parts of lead per billion parts of water (ppb) for public water systems. A public water system has to take actions to reduce the amount of lead in the water if more than 10 percent of the water samples have lead levels over 15 ppb. This is an action level; there is no safe level of lead in water.

I heard something about new lead and copper rule requirements.

The Environmental Protection Agency has proposed a revision to the lead and copper rule. This would change requirements for utilities. The existing rules will remain in place until the proposed rule revisions have gone through public comment and the rule is finalized and approved. Learn more at [Proposed Revisions to the Lead and Copper Rule](#).

Where can I learn more?

City of White Bear Lake website has to all of the following:

- [Lead in Drinking Water](#)
- [Lead in Well Water Systems](#)
- [Reducing Children’s Exposure to Lead in Drinking Water \(PDF\)](#)
- [Reducing Lead in Drinking Water at Minnesota’s School and Child Care Facilities \(PDF\)](#)
- [Drinking Water in Schools](#)
- Learn more about lead at [Lead Poisoning Prevention](#).

Many local, state, and national agencies work on lead issues around the country. The webpages below are some key sources for more information about lead:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Lead](#)
- [EPA: Lead Hotline—The National Lead Information Center](#)
- [EPA: Drinking Water Contaminants—Standards and Regulations](#)
- [Minneapolis Public Works: Lead Fact Sheet](#)
- Minnesota Public Radio provides a [quick way to find out if your pipes are made of lead](#).

Learn more about lead levels in Minnesota.

- [Lead in Minnesota Water: Assessment of Eliminating Lead in Minnesota Drinking Water](#)
- [MN Public Health Data Access Portal: Childhood Lead Exposure](#)
- [Lead Poisoning Prevention Reports](#)
- [Drinking Water Protection Annual Reports](#)