

## **Drinking Water at School District No. 85 Facilities**

### *Questions and Answers*

School District No. 85 (Vancouver Island North) and Island Health are advising parents and guardians of children attending A.J. Elliott Elementary, Eagle View Elementary, Fort Rupert Elementary, North Island Secondary and Port Hardy Secondary Schools that elevated levels of lead have been detected in tap water at each school. Water at all schools was tested during Spring Break.

#### ***What is lead?***

Lead is a metal that is found naturally in the earth's crust. Everyone is exposed to low levels of lead through food, tap water, air, dust, soil and some consumer products. Lead was once used in products like toys, paint and plumbing materials, but the Government of Canada now restricts its use in many products.

#### ***Why has lead been found in tap water at some schools?***

The source of lead in the tap water at some schools on the north island is likely to be building plumbing materials. Lead dissolves into water with characteristics typical of coastal communities when the water sits stagnant for a long period of time in contact with plumbing materials such as lead pipes, lead solder, and older brass or bronze taps and fixtures. Tap water properties, such as low pH and low alkalinity, can impact the potential for lead to dissolve into water. The combination of water chemistry, plumbing materials, and contact time determine the amount of lead in tap water. The water in the water supply mains is tested regularly and has met the *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality* for lead.

#### ***Why were schools tested for lead levels during Spring Break?***

Testing was done during Spring Break, a period of time with the least possible water flow, to determine the worst case scenario (water sitting stagnant in pipes for several days). All locations will be retested in the last week of April and first week of May to determine lead levels after running the water for about three minutes. Results for all sites are anticipated by May 15 and we will publish a summary on our website. With a daily flushing routine (water is run for three minutes before school starts each day) it is anticipated that water at all sites will meet the *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality* for lead.

#### ***Should I be concerned about the levels of lead in the tap water at the schools tested?***

The health impacts of lead exposure depend on many factors including the frequency, duration, and dose of the exposures to a variety of lead sources, as well as individual factors such as age, previous exposure history, nutrition and health.

Exposure to lead through tap water at schools is normally expected to be very low, because water is not sitting in water pipes for very long with the high usage of a typical school day. Even though the water samples were tested in the worst case scenario some samples detected very low levels of lead.

However, as there is no "good" amount of lead and as long term exposure could impact growth and development in young children, we always aim to reduce the lead exposure to as low as reasonably possible. Island Health have been notified of the test results and parents who have concerns may wish to contact their physician to discuss whether testing or follow up is necessary for their child.

**How can I find out if I have high lead in my tap water at home?**

Lead is less likely to be present in buildings constructed after 1989, but the only way to know whether your tap water contains lead is to have it tested as you cannot see, taste, or smell lead in water. To test your water, you should contact your local Public Health Unit or a water testing company. Depending on the age of your home and plumbing materials, you may decide not to sample. If you decide to test your water, water samples can be analyzed for a fee of about \$30. Your results will be mailed or emailed to you within 2-3 weeks

**What can I do to reduce lead exposure in my home?**

Lead exposures in the home setting may vary; families with plumbing containing lead should flush their taps each morning until a temperature drop in the water is observed, indicating the arrival of fresh water beyond the building. It is important to remember other sources of potential lead exposure for children that may be much more significant, such as lead paint. Please see the Government of Canada website for further information about reducing overall lead exposure:

[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/contaminants/lead-plomb/asked\\_questions-questions\\_posees-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/contaminants/lead-plomb/asked_questions-questions_posees-eng.php)

**What is School District No. 85 doing to prevent exposure to elevated levels of lead?**

School District No. 85 will institute a flushing program at all impacted facilities, including those facilities that are not schools. In addition, School District No. 85 will be conducting additional sampling at all facilities to ensure that the tap water within school property will comply with the maximum allowable concentration for lead as set out by the *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality*. Furthermore, the school district has planned to replace or upgrade water fountains at all impacted schools by September 2016 with filtered units that will effectively remove lead.

**What is Island Health's role?**

Island Health is supporting School District No. 85 in developing a sampling program to monitor the lead levels at all School District No. 85 facilities and to recommend an appropriate interim and long-range mitigation strategy for the school district to consider. Along with School District No. 85, Island Health is committed to ensuring that the tap water provided to staff and students at local schools is safe.

**For further information regarding water quality at School District No. 85 schools, please contact:**

Darby Gildersleeve

Manager of Operations and Maintenance

School District No. 85

Phone: 250-949-8155