



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Where were the water samples with lead found? How much lead was found in the water samples?

- Five of the nineteen samples were above the 0.015 mg/L action level for lead. Fourteen of the nineteen samples were below the 0.015 mg/L action level for lead.
- Faucets with lead above the action level were in north wing and west wing.
- The sample in west wing tested at 0.0310 mg/L and four samples in north wing tested between 0.0170 mg/L to 0.0950 mg/L.

### What does it mean to be above or below the action level? And why is that important?

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set an action level of 0.015 mg/L of lead in water. Although the goal is zero, the action level sets a clear standard for public water systems.

### How do people get exposed to lead?

- Lead paint is the major source of lead exposure for children in the U.S. As lead paint deteriorates, peels, or chips, it can contaminate the area. Then, lead enters the body through normal hand-to-mouth activity. (Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry)
- Lead found in tap water usually comes from the corrosion of older fixtures or from the solder that connects pipes. When water sits in leaded pipes for several hours, lead can leach into the water supply. (CDC)
- Lead can be found in many places in the environment. Other sources include contaminated air, water and soil.
- Adults who work with home renovations, batteries, ammunition, or auto repair may be exposed to lead.

### What can I do to reduce lead in my tap water?

- Old lead solder or fixtures can contribute to lead in drinking water. If a water sample indicates lead levels above the 0.015 mg/L action level, be sure to take the following precautions:
  - Run faucet water for 30 seconds to 2 minutes before using it for drinking or cooking. Running water is an effective way to flush lead out of the water lines.
  - Use only cold faucet water for cooking and drinking. Hot water can dissolve more lead.
  - Do not boil water to remove lead. Boiling water does not reduce lead.
- Only if lead levels remain high after initiating all of these steps, additional measures such as a home treatment device or bottled water may need to be considered.



## Can I wash hands and shower in water with lead?

- Yes. Bathing, showering, and hand washing is safe even if water contains lead over the action level.
- Human skin does not absorb lead in water.

## How do I know if my tap water at home is contaminated with lead?

- The only way to know whether your tap water contains lead is to have it tested. You cannot see, taste, or smell lead in drinking water. Therefore, you must ask your water provider whether your water has lead in it. (CDC)
- For homes served by public water systems, data on lead in tap water may be available on the Internet from your local water authority. If your water provider does not post this information, you can call and find out. (CDC)

## What are the health effects associated with lead?

- Lead can cause damage to the brain and kidneys, and can interfere with the production of red blood cells that carry oxygen to your body.
- Most studies show that exposure to lead-contaminated water alone would *not* be likely to elevate blood lead levels in most adults, even exposure to water with a lead content close to the EPA action level for lead. (CDC)
- The greatest risk of lead exposure is to infants, young children, and pregnant women.

## What is YKHC doing to fix the problem?

- YKHC began initiating preliminary safety precautions for infants, young children, and pregnant women to avoid drinking water from affected taps on August 23, 2016. Safety precautions will remain in place as we perform additional water testing and adjust water treatment processes.
- Safe drinking water locations will be set up in the hospital lobby, north and west wings, ER lobby, cafeteria, and OB.
- YKHC facilities staff will be flushing the affected faucets daily. Flushing water is an effective strategy to reduce the lead content of tap water.
- YKHC will conduct additional monitoring for lead in water faucets in the hospital, 800-building, and hostel. These results will be shared as soon as they are available.
- YKHC is working closely with water systems engineers to adjust water treatment processes with the goal of reducing lead levels and consulting with lead experts from the CDC National Center for Environmental Health.
- YKHC will comply with all recommendations from the Alaska Division of Environmental Conservation (ADEC). The ADEC is the drinking water regulatory authority in the state.



# YUKON-KUSKOKWIM HEALTH CORPORATION

“Working Together to Achieve Excellent Health”

## What does this mean for staff and patients?

- Affected faucets at the hospital will be labeled with a precautionary lead advisory sign. These faucets are located in north wing and west wing.
- Safe drinking water stations will be set up in the hospital lobby, north and west wings, ER lobby, cafeteria, and OB.
- Staff are asked to please assist patients in identifying safe drinking water locations.

## References

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
<https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/basic-information-about-lead-drinking-water#health>
- Centers for Disease Control  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tips/water.htm>
- Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry  
<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/csem.asp?csem=7&po=6>