

Water Test Results Frequently Asked Questions

Recently the City of New Brighton sent out letters, brochures and press releases regarding recent water test results indicating elevated levels of lead in some homes. The Minnesota Department of Health and Environmental Protection Agency prescribe most of the content of those communications, and the City of New Brighton only had a limited amount of flexibility in affecting the content of those communications. We welcome this opportunity to provide further information regarding the topic of lead in our water and address the specific questions some of our residents have raised.

As City Manager for more than ten years now, my staff and I have gone to great lengths to communicate about our water and have made every effort to ensure that the New Brighton public has access to safe drinking water. Your trust and faith in our efforts is our measure of success. The City Council, my staff and I will always work to keep your trust and to keep you informed. To that end, we have assembled a FAQ sheet about our recent water tests and the slight exceedances of lead in some of our test sites. I hope you find it informative.

Question: Is the water that New Brighton is receiving from Minneapolis safe?

Answer: Yes. Minneapolis water is safe.

Question: If Minneapolis water is safe, why did I receive a letter about elevated lead levels in recent New Brighton water tests?

Answer: The trace amounts of lead in recent tests are coming from plumbing in private homes; not the City distribution system. Homes built before 1986 could have lead in the household plumbing fixtures, private service lines and joints. Any solder used in home plumbing systems before 1986 likely contains lead.

Question: How widespread is the problem?

Answer: Of the 63 sites tested, 13 (20%) had slightly elevated levels of lead (above 15 parts per billion) in samples taken when the water first began to flow.

Question: What can I do as a private homeowner?

Answer: If you are concerned that lead may be present in your home's plumbing system, you can have your water checked, as described below. Beyond that, everyone can reduce the risk of elevated lead levels simply by flushing out water that has been standing in the pipes. Only use the cold water tap for drinking water and cooking. Run your water until it becomes cold or reaches a steady temperature, usually in 30-60 seconds. This will assure that the water you are using is fresh from outside the home and has not been sitting in the pipes within the home.

Question: How do you know flushing tap water actually helps?

Answer: I directed our engineering staff/consultants to retest the 13 sites that tested above the threshold of 15 parts per billion for lead. My staff were able to test 12 of the 13 sites and all sites dropped to less than 1.3 parts per billion of lead. This was accomplished by simply letting the water run.

Question: Can I do anything else other than flushing the tap water?

Answer: Yes, some home (point-of-use) water treatment units can take out lead. The EPA identifies distillation, reverse osmosis, and some carbon filters as being effective to remove lead. Carbon filters come in many forms, including refrigerator mounted filters, under-sink units, units that attach to your faucet, and even some that come in the form of water pitchers. Please review the product information on the filter to assure it is intended for removal of lead, and follow the instructions for changing the filter. Look for products that are certified for lead removal using ANSI/NSF standards by one of the following organizations: NSF International, Underwriters Laboratories, or the Water Quality Association. .

Question: What if I want to test my own water, how do I do that?

Answer: Go the Minnesota Department of Health website <https://eldo.web.health.state.mn.us/public/accreditedlabs/labsearch.seam> and search for water testing and follow the links related to lead. MDH provides a list of accredited labs that can test your water for you. Cost is usually somewhere between \$20 and \$30.

Question: Why is New Brighton now experiencing elevated levels of lead in its testing sites? Is it related to the switch to Minneapolis water? How do we know that the Minneapolis water is safe?

Answer: Minneapolis water is thoroughly tested and meets all water quality standards when it enters your homes. The lead problem arises because the Minneapolis water has a different effect on your home plumbing than the water previously provided from New Brighton. For decades the water you received from New Brighton was obtained from groundwater wells. That groundwater was not softened, and over a long period of time the minerals it contained formed a thin protective coating on your pipes and plumbing fixtures that helped prevent lead from entering the water. Minneapolis water comes from the Mississippi River, and the treatment process includes softening to remove minerals and it is disinfected differently than New Brighton's water. The softened Minneapolis water has the effect of dissolving the mineral deposits that coat your pipes, exposing the lead in solder and fixtures.

Question: Will this situation continue?

Answer: No. New Brighton is working diligently to complete an addition to its groundwater treatment plant. That plant is scheduled to be back in service by fall of 2018. When it is ready, we will shut off the Minneapolis supply and return to use of unsoftened groundwater. When that happens, the thin mineral coating in your plumbing system should re-establish and we

expect that test results will begin to return to the acceptable levels observed prior to the switch.

Question: Did New Brighton anticipate this as a potential problem when we switched to Minneapolis water?

Answer: Yes, we did and after working closely with MDH, Minneapolis and our consultant we initiated a corrosion control program to mitigate the anticipated impacts. We began introducing orthophosphates to the water prior to, and following, the switch to Minneapolis water in 2016.

Question: What are orthophosphates and how safe are they?

Answer: Orthophosphates are substances commonly added to public water systems as a corrosion inhibitor. When added they form a protective layer that acts as a barrier to corrosion, reducing dissolution of lead into the water. The typical phosphate levels found in a liter of drinking water are about one hundred times lower than the phosphate levels found in the average American diet. For example, a person would have to drink ten to fifteen liters of water to equal the amount of phosphates in just one can of soda.

Question: Why haven't the orthophosphates prevented the lead levels in the recent round of sampling?

Answer: It takes time to build up the protective coating in the home plumbing system. During the winter, the volume of water moving through the distribution system is much lower, as much as one fifth of the volume that can move through the system in the summer. That lower flow reduces the ability of orthophosphate to coat pipes. Since the Minneapolis switch was made in the middle of last summer, we haven't yet had a full season to condition the system.

Question: How often does New Brighton test its water for lead?

Answer: Communities with populations between 10,000 and 100,000 are required to test 60 sample sites every six months.