Why am I receiving this brochure?

Boston’s water quality sampling taken of 25 homes during the fall of 2021 found elevated levels of lead in drinking water in 4 homes.

To monitor lead levels, Boston Water and Sewer Commission (BWSC) is required to test tap water in homes that are known to have lead. These homes are usually older homes that may have lead service lines or lead solder, and are intentionally tested after water has been sitting overnight. The EPA rule requires that 90% of these worst case samples must have lead levels below the Action Level of 15 ppb. You are receiving this brochure to provide information to you and your household about what you can do to reduce lead in your drinking water.

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 is 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.

Sources of Lead

Lead is a common metal found in the environment. Common sources of lead exposure are lead-based paint, household dust, soil, and some plumbing materials including faucets purchased before January 2014. Lead can also be found in other household items such as pottery, make-up, toys, and even food. Lead paint was outlawed in 1978, but dust from homes that still have lead paint is the most common source of exposure to lead. Therefore, make sure to wash your children’s hands and toys often as they can come into contact with dirt and dust containing lead.

The water provided by MWRA is lead-free when it leaves the reservoirs. Local distribution pipes that contact with dirt and dust containing lead. The water provided by MWRA is lead-free when it leaves the reservoirs. Local distribution pipes that 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.

Steps You Can Take To Reduce Exposure To Lead In Drinking Water

**Identify if your plumbing or fixtures contain lead:** If your home has a lead service line (the pipe connecting your house to the water main in the street), consider replacing it to reduce the possibility of elevated lead levels. Call the BWSC Lead Hotline at 617-989-7888 to find out about the Lead Incentive Replacement Program. Faucets purchased before 2014 may also contribute lead to drinking water. For more information contact www.mwra.com.

**Use cold, fresh water for cooking and preparing baby formula:** Do not cook with, drink, or make baby formula with water from the hot water tap. Lead dissolves more easily in hot water.

**Test your home for lead:** The only way to determine the level of lead in drinking water at your home is to have the water tested by a state certified laboratory. The test to use is usually between $20 and $50. A list of labs is available online at www.mwra.com or call (617) 242-5323. Consider having your paint tested also.

**Test your child for lead:** Contact your local health department or your health care provider to find out how you can get your child tested. A blood lead level test is the only way to know if your child is being exposed to lead. For more information, contact the state Department of Public Health at 1-800-532-9571 or search MDPH for lead.

**Consider using a filter:** If your water contains lead, you may want to consider using a filter. Make sure the filter you are considering removes lead — not all filters do. Be sure to replace filters in accordance with manufacturer’s instructions to protect water quality. Contact NSF International at 1-800-NSF-8010 or www.nsf.org for more information on water filters. Also, if you are considering using bottled water, note that it may cost up to 1,000 times more than tap water. Simply flushing your tap, as described above, is usually a cheaper, equally effective alternative.
What is being done to control lead in the drinking water?

MWRA and BWSC are concerned about lead in your drinking water. We have an extensive testing program and treat the water to make it less corrosive. Starting in 1996, MWRA increased the pH and buffering capacity of the water, and has steadily fine-tuned these levels to further reduce the leaching of lead into drinking water. Due to this treatment change, lead levels found in sample tests of tap water have dropped around 90 percent since 1992. Although most homes have very low levels of lead in their drinking water, some homes may still have lead levels above the EPA Action Level of 15 parts per billion (ppb).

Up until January 2014, Federal law allowed brass fixtures such as faucets to contain up to 8% lead. Faucets sold after then are essentially lead free and will not contribute lead to drinking water. Replacing an older faucet is one way to reduce the potential for elevated lead levels in your drinking water. You can also run the water to flush out any new water in contact with the older brass faucet.

BWSC Lead Replacement Incentive Program

BWSC encourages Boston’s property owners to replace private lead water services through its Lead Replacement Incentive Program. This program provides financial assistance of up to $4000.00 towards the cost of the replacement. Residents can also look up information about a lead service line at a particular property by using the interactive Lead Service Map on the website at https://www.bwsc.org/environment-education/maproom/lead-service-map. For questions about the lead replacement incentive program contact the BWSC Lead Hotline at 617-989-7888. For more information on reducing lead exposure around your home and the health effects of lead, visit EPA’s website at www.epa.gov/lead, search for MassDEP lead or MDPH lead, or contact your health care provider.