



# LEAD AND WATER IN CHICAGO



## WHAT IS LEAD?

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines lead as a naturally occurring element that can be toxic to humans and animals, often causing health effects
- Lead compounds have been used in many products found in and around the home, including paint, pipes, plumbing materials, gasoline, batteries, and cosmetics

### HOW DOES LEAD GET INTO OUR WATER?

Lead enters water via corroded lead plumbing, including pipes, faucets, and plumbing fixtures

### WHY IS THE LEAD CONTAMINATION PROBLEM SO BAD IN CHICAGO?

- Until 1986, Chicago required lead pipes to be used to connect homes to the water system—they are now outlawed
- Homes built before 1986 are more likely to have contaminated water

### WHAT TO DO IF THERE'S LEAD IN YOUR WATER

- Let your tap run for 30-60 seconds before using it for drinking or cooking
  - If you know your home has lead pipes, let it run for 3-5 minutes
- Use cold water for drinking and cooking
- Don't boil your water—this will not help
- Purchase a water filter that removes lead
  - Make sure it's certified by the NSF, WQA, or other certifying agency
  - Look for those that meet Standard 53

### HOW IS IT HARMFUL? WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

- Exposure to lead is especially harmful to children and can cause:
  - Damage to the brain and nervous system
  - Slowed growth and development
  - Learning and behavior problems
  - Hearing and speech problems
- This can lead to:
  - Lower IQ
  - Difficulty paying attention
  - Underperformance in school
- During pregnancy, lead exposure can harm a baby's nervous system and increase the risk of miscarriage or stillbirth
- There is no safe level of lead exposure

### HOW TO KNOW IF THIS PROBLEM IS AFFECTING YOU

- There is no way to see, taste, smell lead in water
- Ask your water provider if your home uses a lead service line (the pipes connecting your home to water)
- Test your water for lead
- If you think you or your child has been exposed, contact your health care provider for a blood lead test

## HOW AND WHERE TO GET A TEST KIT IN CHICAGO:

**Call 311** or visit [www.chicagowaterquality.org](http://www.chicagowaterquality.org) to request a free water test kit or have a Department of Water Management representative come to you to collect water samples