

Information Leaflet Lead in Drinking Water

Have you Got Lead Pipes?

Some drinking water can contain lead in undesirable amounts. This leaflet explains how you can find out whether that is so in your home and what and what you can do about it.

Is Lead Harmful?

Lead is commonly found in the environment. It comes from a variety of sources including vehicle exhausts and old paint work and may be present in air, food, soil or water. Lead can build up in the body and it can be harmful. It is sensible to avoid excessive exposure from any source.

The Government has taken action to reduce exposure to lead from petrol, paint and drinking water. Nevertheless some infants and children may still be at risk. Studies have shown that lead can have a small effect on the mental development of children. It may also be a factor in behavioural problems. It is best therefore to keep lead levels in water as low as possible.

How Does Lead Get Into Drinking Water?

Water does not contain lead when it leaves the treatment works.

For a long time, generally up to the early 1960s, lead was used in the manufacture of some water pipes. Part or all of the service pipe connecting the water main in the street to the property as well as the internal plumbing in buildings may be made of lead. For these reasons, the amount of lead in drinking water can sometimes be above the standard.

Know If There Are Lead Pipes In My Home?

If your home has been modernised since the early 1960s and all of its pipework replaced from the stop valve outside your home to the kitchen tap, there should be no lead pipe on your property.

If your home was built:

- **before the early 1960s, it may have lead pipes**
- **after the early 1960s, it is unlikely to have lead pipes**

If you are unsure, you can make a simple check:

Inside your home -

Look in or behind the cupboards in your kitchen. You may also need to look in other places, e.g. the cupboard under the stairs. Find the pipe leading to the kitchen tap. Check if it is lead along as much of its length as possible. Unpainted lead pipes are dull grey. They are also soft. If you scrape the surface gently with a knife, you will see the shiny, silver-coloured metal beneath.

Outside your home -

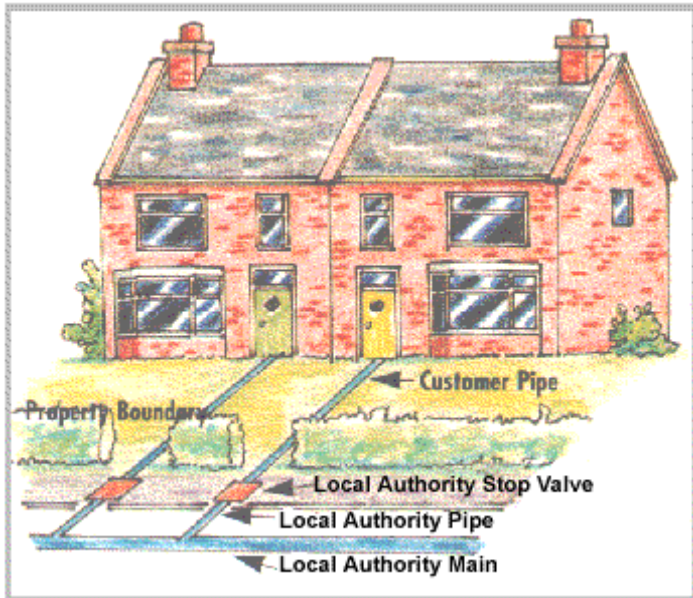
Open the flap of the stop valve outside your property. Examine the pipe leading from the stop valve to the property. If you can, scrape its surface gently with a knife. It may not be possible to do this in some cases as access may be difficult.

Other pipe materials in common use are:

- **copper** - bright, hard and dull brown
- **iron** - dark, very hard and may be rusty
- **plastic** - may be grey, black or blue.

If in doubt, ask a plumber for advice.

Who is Responsible For The Pipework?



The part of the service pipe which links the water main in the street to the stop valve outside your property belongs to Clare County Council. The part of the service pipe leading from the stop valve outside your property to the point where it enters your home is your responsibility if you are the owner, otherwise it is your landlord's.

All the plumbing inside your home to the kitchen tap is your responsibility or your landlord's.

What Can I Do To Reduce Lead Levels?

If lead pipes are causing high lead levels in your drinking water, you can take some simple short-term precautions:

- Do not drink water that has been standing in the pipes for long periods, for example, overnight, or if no one has been in for several hours.

- In these circumstances, draw off a washing-up sink full of water from the kitchen tap to clear the water which has been standing in the pipes. This need not be wasted but can be used on the garden or for something other than drinking or cooking. If the length of lead pipes exceeds 40 metres, more than a sink full of water will need to be drawn off.
- You can then use the water from the kitchen tap as usual.
- If you have any lead pipework between the stop valve outside your home and your kitchen tap, **the best solution is to replace it.**

Make sure that removing lead water pipes does not reduce electrical safety by removing earthing. Ask your electricity supplier if in doubt.

Useful Hints

Whether or not there is lead plumbing in your home:

- for drinking and cooking, **always** use the water from the cold water tap in the kitchen.
- avoid drinking water from bathroom taps.

Where Can I Get Further Advice?

- From Clare County Council (065 - 6821616)
- From HSE (public health department 061 – 483338)
- From a qualified plumber