Expect great things.

Pittsburgh Public Schools

Friday, November 22, 2019

Dear Parent/Guardian of a Pittsburgh Public Schools student,

Over the course of the last nine months, the District took proactive steps to retest all drinking water and cooking use fixtures, including classrooms, offices, nurse's offices and other sink faucets in every school building and facility for lead. In 2016, Pittsburgh Public Schools was one of the first districts in the region to test all drinking water and cooking use fixtures. At that time, the District also provided new filtered high efficiency water coolers with bottle filling stations at all schools.

Through this most recent effort, the District tested 2,314 water fixtures across all schools and collected 4,623 samples using the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 3Ts for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water in Schools and Child Care Facilities recommended sampling methodology. Of the 4,623 samples taken, 2.4% showed levels of lead above 15 parts per billion (ppb), which is the action level established by PA School Code Act 39 Section 742 amended in 2018.

All fixtures where lead exceeding 15 ppb was found were immediately shut off and signage to prohibit usage was posted. Immediate action was taken by the District to repair or replace these fixtures. Detailed findings for your child's school are available online at www.pghschools.org/qualityH2O.

The health and safety of our students and staff is of the utmost importance and we are committed to addressing any issues that arise and completing a transparent process. On the reverse side of this letter, there is some information about lead and drinking water.

Additional information, including your child's school findings are available at www.pghschools.org/qualityH2O or you can contact the Parent Hotline at 412-529-HELP (4357) with questions. If you have concerns related to your child's health, we recommended that you contact your child's physician.

Sincerely,

Pamela Capretta, Chief Operations Officer

Operations & Facilities

Pamela Capretta
Chief of Operations

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What is lead?
Lead is a soft malleable and heavy metal. Lead is naturally occurring and can be found in air, soil, water, and even inside our homes. If ingested or inhaled, lead and its compounds can be harmful to animals and humans.

Where can I learn more about the effects of lead?
Additional information on the effects of lead are available at the following websites:

- Allegheny County Health Department: http://www.achd.net/lead/drinking-water ;
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): https://www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/basic-information-about-lead-drinking-water
- Center for Disease Control (CDC): http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/

You can also contact the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

How does lead get into drinking water?
The deterioration of older plumbing fixtures and pipes that contact lead can cause lead to enter drinking water. Lead in a water sample can originate from the water fixture (fountain, sink, etc.), plumbing upstream of the outlet fixture (pipe, joints, valves, fittings etc.), or it can already be in the water that is entering the facility. Homes built before 1986 are more likely to have lead pipes and fixtures.

How was each water fixture tested at my child's school?
The District followed the EPA's 3Ts for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water in Schools and Child Care Facility recommended two-step sample process and took two samples from each water fixture in each school and District facility. The two step process consist of a first-draw sample being taken from the first water to come out of a fixture that has not been used for 8 to 18 hours – after sitting overnight unused. The second sample is what is referred to as a flushed sample and is taken after letting water run from the fixture for 30 seconds. The concentrations of lead in first-draw samples are usually higher than in flushed samples.

How can children come into contact with lead?
The most common source of lead is found in lead-based paint. Lead-based paint is often found in homes that were painted or built before 1978. In these homes, old paint can peel, chip, or weather to produce dust that contains lead.

What are the effects of lead in children?
According to the EPA's website, low levels of exposure have been linked to damage to the central and peripheral nervous system, learning disabilities, shorter stature, impaired hearing, and impaired formation and function of blood cells.

What should I do if I suspect my child has lead poisoning?
If you are concerned that your child has been exposed to lead, please contact your child's physician. A physician usually orders a blood test to detect lead poisoning. Lead levels in the blood are measured in micrograms per deciliter (mcg/dL). A level of 5 mcg/dL or higher indicates your child may have unsafe levels of lead in their blood and should have their blood tested periodically.

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