

Benton Harbor Water Quality: Update for Residents

In 2018, it was discovered that there was a problem with high lead levels in tap water in Benton Harbor. The City performed routine monitoring for lead and copper by sampling at homes connected to the Benton Harbor Water Supply and found that more than 10% of these samples exceeded the Action Level for lead. The samples collected in previous rounds did not have the same elevated results.

Can I have my tap water tested for lead? If so, how?

To determine if your home qualifies to be included in City testing (homes with lead service lines), call Ellis Mitchell at 269-927-8400. If your home isn't eligible for the compliance program, there are other options for testing. The City may be able to connect you to a certified lab, or you can directly contact a certified lab. A list of certified labs is available at Michigan.gov/EGLElab.

What can I do as a resident to ensure my tap water is safe?

1 **Get your water moving.** Flushing water pipes can reduce the amount of lead in your water. If you have not used your water for several hours, flush your pipes following your public water supply's recommended amount of time by doing any of the following:



RUNNING
FAUCETS



TAKING A
SHOWER



DOING
LAUNDRY



WASHING
DISHES



RUNNING
THE HOSE

For more information on what to do after plumbing changes inside or outside the home, go to: bit.ly/391ycD0.

2 **Use a point-of-use water filter.** A certified lead-reducing filter can reduce lead in drinking water. Filters are made to reduce lead, but do not guarantee that all lead will be removed from drinking water. For more information on choosing a POU water filter, go to bit.ly/2vaHLkO.

3 **Clean your faucet aerators.** Clean the mesh screen, or aerator, on the end of your faucet at least every six months. If construction is being done to the water system or pipes near your home—including water meter replacement in your home—check and clean your drinking water faucet aerator every month until the work is done. Go to bit.ly/2JgIQvE for more information.

4 **Consider replacing older plumbing, pipes, and faucets that may add lead to water.** Older faucets, fittings, and valves sold before 2014 may contain up to 8 percent lead, even if marked “lead-free.” Look for replacement faucets made in 2014 or later and make sure they are NSF 61 certified or marked to contain 0.25 percent lead or less. Check your plumbing or hire a plumber to know what parts should be replaced to reduce lead in your drinking water.

What actions have been taken since the city learned of the lead issue in tap water?

Many efforts are underway to measure and minimize corrosion. **The first action that was taken was to tell the residents of the city of Benton Harbor that there were elevated levels of lead in the drinking water** and how to protect themselves by running their water, and/or, by obtaining a lead reducing water filter.

The Berrien County Health Department (BCHD) began providing filters in 2019. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services provides the funding for the filter and BCHD provides staffing and locations to distribute the filters. For help with securing a water filter, go to [berriencounty.org/1599/City-of-Benton-Harbor](https://www.berriencounty.org/1599/City-of-Benton-Harbor).

The City has begun replacing lead service lines. This is an important step because the best way to reduce lead levels is by removing the sources of lead in the system. Because removal of all lead service lines is going to take quite some time, the city has also installed corrosion control treatment to help reduce the amount of corrosivity of the water, which will reduce lead levels.

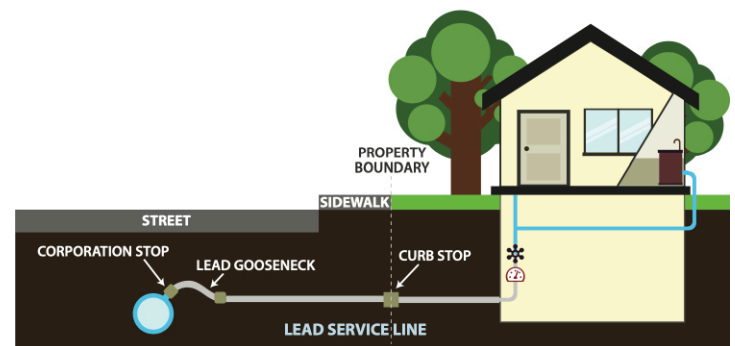
The City has increased the monitoring of lead and copper. The City is now sampling twice as many homes as they were previously, and they are sampling those homes more often (every 6 months instead of every 3 years). *This sampling is done so that everyone knows the levels of lead and copper in the system, and to show when the corrosion control treatment has become effective in lowering the levels of lead.

What remains to be done in order to reduce lead in tap water below the Action Level?

The Lead and Copper Rule requires collecting samples from a number of homes, reporting the results to the residents of those homes, and reporting the results to the state. Benton Harbor will have resolved the Action Level exceedance when the corrosion control treatment has reduced lead levels in homes, and two back-to-back six-month rounds of sampling confirm this. Both six-month sets of sampling must have a 90th percentile that is less than 15 parts per billion. The City is also required to conduct a study of the corrosion control treatment to identify the most effective treatment to reduce lead. Currently, the City is seeking a qualified expert to propose a detailed plan for the study.

Since there is no lead in the water that comes from Lake Michigan or in the water as it leaves the water treatment plant, how does lead get into the water?

Drinking water is free of lead until it is in contact with lead containing materials, such as lead service lines. Then as it sits in contact with lead containing materials the lead begins to be dissolved into the water. The longer that water sits motionless and in contact with lead containing materials the more lead it can “pick up”. Most of the lead containing materials that can be in contact with drinking water are found in the service line (the water line coming from the water main in the street into your home) or within your home in the form of pipes, solder, or brass.



See page one for more information on reducing the amount of lead in your drinking water.

You can learn more about the dangers of lead to health at this link:

<https://www.berriencounty.org/1568/Lead-Drinking-Water>

[Michigan.gov/CleanWater](https://www.michigan.gov/CleanWater)

