

Working Together to Reduce Lead Exposure in Benton Harbor

You may have been informed that recent testing discovered a problem with high lead levels in tap water in Benton Harbor. State and local partners are working together to make sure that you have the information needed to protect your family. This fall, we will host a three-part series in the Benton Spirit Community Newspaper to share an overview of when we discovered lead in water in Benton Harbor, what we're doing to support to community residents and what's being done to address the issue and remove lead service lines in Benton Harbor. The Benton Harbor Community Water Council, the City of Benton Harbor, Berrien County Health Department, Andrews University, Freshwater Future, and the Benton Spirit Community Newspaper, along with the Office of the Clean Water Public Advocate, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services are joining forces to ensure that Benton Harbor residents have access to information and free resources to reduce lead in water.

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

Though the water treatment plant is relatively new, Benton Harbor's water distribution system is about 100 years old with much of the original infrastructure still in use, including water mains and service lines. It is known that a high number of lead service lines were installed in the first half of the 20th century and many homes built before the 1960s are likely to have lead service lines or pipes that pose a health risk to residents.

Elevated lead levels were first discovered during routine testing in 2018. The first action that was taken was to tell Benton Harbor residents 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.

The City installed corrosion control treatment to help reduce the amount of corrosivity of the water, which will reduce lead levels, and has begun the process of replacing lead service lines (estimated to be 3,011 lines). This is an important step because the best way to reduce lead levels is by removing the sources of lead in the system.

The City has also 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 six months instead of every three 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.

If you would like to join state and local partners to help spread the word about lead efforts in Benton Harbor, email EGLE-CleanWater@michigan.gov.

CITY OF BENTON HARBOR Water System History



1938
Construction of water tower at Britain Street, helping to keep pressure on the system and provide water for fire fighting



1990
Upgrades to water treatment plant to update equipment, including pumping and chemical treatment



2011-2013
Loss of Township customers results in reduced sales of water

1914 and previous

Construction of original pipe network for well water. (Exists today as the distribution system.)



1950
Construction of original water treatment plant and Lake Michigan water intake.



2010
Upgrades to water treatment plant to replace outdated treatment process and upgrade computer controls



2020
Upgrades to the Distribution System to replace aging water pipe and lead service lines, and repaint the water tower

Last updated August 2020

Photo credit: Ernie Sarkipato, EGLE

Can I get my 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 Mike O'Malley at 269-363-0575. 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.