

## School Drinking Water Quality: Parent Information Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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### INTRODUCTION

Healthy water is important to everyone and especially for children as they are still growing and learning. All children need access to healthy water. Michigan’s children spend a significant portion of their day in school or childcare facilities and therefore quality drinking water in these facilities is critical to a child’s overall health, development, and performance.

Many schools and childcare facilities receive their water from a public water system. The water going into these facilities must meet State of Michigan requirements for drinking water. However, outdated plumbing within the school or childcare facility may allow unhealthy contaminants, like lead, into the water.

The School Drinking Water Program, within the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), works with schools and childcare facilities to monitor water quality.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Who makes sure drinking water in a school or childcare building is healthy?**

The administrator or owner is responsible for the quality of drinking water inside the building. Although, it takes everyone in the school community to help.

### **Why should I be concerned about the drinking water in a school or childcare facility if the water supplier is responsible for treating and delivering the water?**

A community water supplier is required by law to deliver water to all its customers that meets all the regulated standards. However, the water supplier does not own school buildings, childcare facilities, or your home and is not responsible for the pipes and faucets within these buildings. Sometimes, unhealthy things can get into the water from old pipes and faucets; things like bacteria, copper, and lead. This happens when the water that sits in those older pipes and faucets without moving. This is called stagnant water, which happens all the time. For example, water sits still overnight when everyone is gone or asleep or during long weekends and holiday breaks.

If your child's school or childcare facility gets water from a well on the property, it is also required by law to treat and deliver water that meets all regulations within its own building(s).

### **Why is stagnant water a concern?**

Stagnant water is water that stays motionless in pipes, which increases the potential for the release of lead or copper, and the growth of bacteria in the drinking water.

### **Why are bacteria in drinking water a concern?**

Bacteria are present everywhere in our environment. They can live and reproduce inside animals, humans, in water, soil, and food. Most bacteria in small numbers do not cause health problems, but bacteria that enter the drinking water system at weak spots or breaks in the plumbing can grow to large numbers in the pipes when water is not used for long periods of time (like during long weekends or summer breaks). Bacteria's ability to grow to large numbers in the system is usually slowed or stopped by the continued use of water, flushing them out.

### **Why is copper in drinking water a concern?**

Copper exposure in large amounts can cause stomach and intestinal distress, liver or kidney damage, and increased complications in people who suffer from Wilson's disease. Children's bodies absorb more copper than the average adult because of their rapid development, increasing the concern of elevated levels of copper in their drinking water.

### **Why is lead in drinking water a concern?**

When lead is consumed, it can cause non-reversible neurological health problems. The health concern is much greater in young children because of their frequent hand-to-mouth activity (which increases their exposure) and because their bodies and nervous systems are still developing.

### **Is any lead in drinking water considered safe?**

Lead is very toxic to humans and animals. There is no safe level of lead, which is why we are continually looking for ways to reduce overall exposure to lead.

### Is drinking water the only possible source of lead exposure?

No. Lead can come from many sources including lead-based paint chips or dust on windowsills or floors, and soil. Please visit [MiLeadSafe.gov](https://www.mileadsafe.gov) to learn more about lead exposure risks.

### How do I know if my children are being exposed to lead?

The only way to know if your child has a significant recent or on-going exposure to lead is to get them a blood lead test. You can contact your healthcare provider or your local health department to request a simple blood test to see if your child has elevated blood lead levels.

### How will my child's school or childcare facility know what is in the drinking water?

The only way to know what may be in the drinking water is for schools and childcare administrators to collect water samples and have them tested. Samples collected and tested can show if harmful things are in the water such as bacteria, lead or copper.

### What can a school or childcare facility do to keep the drinking waters quality?

Schools or childcare facilities can keep the water moving in their buildings to help ensure the drinking water maintains its quality. Preventing stagnant water helps keep unhealthy things out of the water, does not cost much, and can be done easily. Another action that schools or childcare facilities can take to improve their drinking water is to replace older pipes, faucets, and drinking fountains; although this may be expensive and take time.

### What are some things I can do?

Get involved. Be an advocate for drinking water. Ask your school or childcare facility if the drinking water has been tested. If testing has not been done, ask your facility manager or school board when they plan on sampling and testing. If you are also concerned about the water in your home, ask your local water supplier about becoming a testing location for lead and copper or how to test your home for lead or copper yourself. Visit the Clean Water Public Advocate webpage at [Michigan.gov/CleanWater](https://Michigan.gov/CleanWater) to learn more about what communities are doing around the state and how you can get involved.

### What is EGLE doing?

EGLE has a School Drinking Water Program to help schools and childcare facilities that get their water from a community water supplier. The program offers guidance on how a school or child care facility can provide high quality drinking water within their buildings, and has a [website \(Michigan.gov/SchoolWater\)](https://Michigan.gov/SchoolWater) with materials for schools to use. EGLE has helped many schools identify their lead risk in their pipes and faucets and set-up plans for sampling. The EGLE School Drinking Water Program currently receives federal money to do lead testing at qualifying schools. To find out if your school or childcare facility can participate in this program, please call Holly Gohlke, Program Coordinator, at 517-220-1904 and volunteer.

### Where can I find other resources?

For information on where parents can get their child tested for lead, go to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services lead poisoning prevention website: [Michigan.gov/Lead](https://Michigan.gov/Lead). For information on water testing, visit [Michigan.gov/MiLeadSafe](https://Michigan.gov/MiLeadSafe).

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