

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 73 (KAMLOOPS/THOMPSON)

PRESS RELEASE



June 13, 2017

SD 73 working hard to keep school water safe for students, staff, public

All schools in School District No. 73 (Kamloops/Thompson) will immediately begin to flush hallway fountains and classroom taps to ensure that drinking water does not contain elevated levels of lead.

The decision to flush all cold-water sources of drinking water in SD 73 schools follows the discovery that some local schools had slightly elevated levels of lead in their drinking water at the beginning of the day when the faucet or tap was first turned on. The district has recently finished testing the water in all schools.

In instances when a water fountain or tap tested higher than acceptable for lead, further evaluation showed that simply running outlets for 30 seconds to one minute flushed lead from the system. As a result, district managers decided to create a flushing protocol for all schools.

“We are doing this out of an abundance of caution,” said Michelle Marginet, SD 73’s Manager of Health and Safety. “This is an important health and safety initiative for students and staff alike. We want to do all we can to ensure that water in our schools is safe for people to drink.”

The issue of lead in school drinking water emerged as a provincial issue after elevated levels of lead were found in some Lower Mainland schools. The Ministry of Education directed all B.C. districts to test their water systems.

The problem occurs when water sits in pipes overnight or through a weekend and comes into prolonged contact with lead pipe solder commonly used in home, business and institutional plumbing systems in buildings constructed before 1990.

Marginet said testing in SD 73 showed that in some schools, lead levels are elevated in the morning when the tap or faucet is turned on for the first time of the day. Once the water is running, however, lead levels in those outlets quickly drops below regulatory health standards and tests safe for the remainder of the day.

As a result, district management decided it was best to create a district-wide flushing protocol in all schools built before 1990, even in schools where no problems were measured. The district worked with Interior Health to develop the protocol, as well as to create information for parents and the public.

“We really are trying to be proactive,” Marginet said. “We are being overly cautious because we want to ensure no one is exposed to lead, and this is the only way we can guarantee it.”

The district has instructed staff about the new requirements. Custodians, teachers and principals will ensure school drinking water outlets are flushed for one minute at the start of every school day. A letter will be sent to parents explaining the issue and the proposed solutions.

Long-term solutions — including the possibility of replacing piping in schools — are being explored. Annual testing will continue in district schools to ensure the flushing protocol is working.

For more information, contact:

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Attachment: Joint IHA-SD 73 Bulletin to Schools/Parents Regarding School Drinking Water



June 13, 2017

Lead Testing in Drinking Water at SD 73 Schools and District Facilities

Last year, B.C.'s Ministry of Education directed all school districts to test their schools and facilities for lead in water. This is after elevated levels of lead were discovered in the drinking water systems of some B.C. schools.

School District No. 73 (Kamloops/Thompson) has completed initial testing of its schools and district facilities. The results show that in some local schools, levels of lead in the water are slightly above standards set by Health Canada.

Further testing has shown that running the water for one minute (flushing) reduces all lead levels to well within acceptable limits. As a result, SD 73 will implement a daily flushing program in all of its schools and facilities before they open for the day. The only exception is Pacific Way Elementary as it was built in 2001 and no elevated lead levels have been detected at that school.

Water fountains and taps that commonly provide drinking water will be flushed for one minute, starting immediately. Records will be kept by each school. Any taps (such as bathroom taps) which are not part of the flushing program will have signage posted nearby indicating that they are not to be used for drinking water.

The school district will continue with an annual testing protocol as per Ministry of Education requirements to ensure the water in schools and facilities is safe to drink. If you have specific questions about the testing at your child's school, please contact the school principal.

Frequently Asked Questions about Lead in Water

What is lead?

Lead is a metal that is found naturally in the Earth's crust. Everyone is exposed to low levels of lead through food, tap water, air, dust, soil, and some consumer products. Lead was once used in products such as toys, paint, and plumbing materials, but the Government of Canada now restricts its use in many products.

Why has lead been found in drinking water at some schools?

The source of lead in the tap water tested is likely to be from building plumbing materials. Lead dissolves into water when the water sits stagnant for a long period of time in lead pipes, lead solder, and older brass or bronze taps and fixtures. Tap water properties, such as low pH and low alkalinity, can impact the potential for lead to dissolve into water. The combination of water chemistry, plumbing materials, and contact time determine the amount of lead in tap water.

Why were local schools tested for lead levels?

A policy came into effect September 26, 2016, requiring all schools to test for lead content in their drinking water and report the results annually to the Ministry of Education. The concern is that schools serve a population (young children) that is vulnerable to lead exposure, and water in the buildings may sit in pipes with lead components for extended periods of time.



What is Interior Health's role?

Interior Health is working with School District No. 73 (Kamloops/Thompson) to monitor lead levels at all school facilities to ensure that the tap water does not exceed the maximum allowable concentrations per Health Canada standards.

How can I find out if I have high lead in my tap water at home?

Lead is less likely to be present in buildings constructed after 1989, but the only way to know whether or not your tap water contains lead is to have it tested because you cannot see, taste, or smell lead in water. To test your water, contact an [accredited laboratory](#) to arrange for sample collection and processing. The lab will send you the necessary sample bottles and instructions.

What can I do to reduce lead exposure in my home?

Lead exposure in the home setting may vary. Families living in homes with plumbing containing lead should flush their taps each morning until a temperature drop in the water is observed, indicating the arrival of fresh water beyond the building. It is important to remember other sources of potential lead exposure for children that may be much more significant, such as lead paint.

Please see the Government of Canada website for further information about reducing overall lead exposure: <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/healthy-living-vie-saine/environnement-environnement/home-maison/lead-plomb-eng.php>

For further information regarding water quality at SD 73 please contact:

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