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Lead Levels Found in Tap Water of Older New York City Homes Return to Normal**Run Your Tap Campaign Still Advises Residents How to Lower the Risks of Lead Exposure from Household Plumbing**

Environmental Protection Commissioner Cas Holloway and Health Commissioner Thomas Farley today announced that lead levels found in drinking water in older New York City homes have returned to normal. In 2010, DEP and Health Department launched the *Run Your Tap* campaign, a public service campaign to educate city residents about simple precautions that can reduce potential exposure to lead from internal plumbing systems. While New York City's drinking water in reservoirs and throughout the distribution system is virtually lead-free and of the highest quality, the campaign was in response to elevated lead levels found in tap water of some older homes that are known to have lead in their household plumbing. The City monitors lead levels in a sampling of these residences and provides notifications to all homeowners when elevated levels are found.

"The results of our most recent sampling confirm that NYC Water remains the safest and healthiest drink available," said Commissioner Holloway. "We have always known that our reservoir and distribution system is lead free, but some older homes have plumbing that can impact water quality and allow lead to enter tap water at those private residences. Because of slightly elevated levels found in samples taken last year, we launched our *Run Your Tap* campaign with public service announcements and bus stop and shelter ads to tell people how to reduce potential exposure. Residents should still take those simple precautions, including running your tap until the water gets cool—for at least 30 seconds—for drinking, cooking and making baby formula whenever the faucet has not been used for several hours. We will continue testing tap water in older homes with lead plumbing and keep New Yorkers informed of any new findings; based on the latest data, the steps DEP has taken, such as adjusting our pH levels and minimizing fluctuations in treatment, are having their desired effect."

MORE INFORMATION

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"Water is the healthiest of all beverages and we encourage people to drink tap water," said Commissioner Farley. "We're pleased that the recent testing shows that lead levels in the water have declined."

As part of the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act, DEP conducts tap water testing at a sample of homes in New York City known to have lead service lines or lead solder in pipes. The EPA requires that if test results from these at risk homes indicate that more than 10% of water samples exceed 15 parts per billion (ppb), then water utilities must notify the public of potential lead exposure risks. The results of the most recent sampling, taken from January 1 through June 30, showed a substantial decrease in the number of samples that exceeded EPA standards. This year's test results showed that less than 2% (2 samples) of 114 samples were elevated, well below the 10% threshold.

The results of last year's sampling had showed an increase in the number of samples above 15 ppb, with 14% (30 samples) of 222 samples that were elevated. At the time, New York City was required to increase the frequency of testing from once a year to twice a year and notify the public because of the elevation. DEP and the Health Department subsequently launched the Run Your Tap campaign. New York City was not unique in experiencing this. Cities such as Boston, Washington D.C., Providence, and Portland, Oregon have all exceeded the action threshold in the past decade. In order to comply with EPA notification requirements, DEP will continue to inform customers of potentially elevated levels of lead on water bills until a second round of testing, to be completed by the end of this year, comes back within regulatory requirements. To increase the sampling pool to get a better and more accurate representation of lead levels, homeowners who live in residences with lead services lines or lead plumbing who are interested in participating in the sampling program can now receive a \$25 dollar credit on their water bill. Those interested should call 311 to more information and see if they qualify.

A panel that includes DEP scientists and world-renowned experts in corrosion control is currently examining the potential reasons for last year's elevation in lead levels with the goal of determining a cause. Although the work of the panel is not yet complete, the most likely factor appears to be minor fluctuations in pH levels, which can impact the corrosivity of water and result in faster chemical reactions within older homes that have lead pipes or plumbing in them.

Protective Steps New Yorkers Can Still Take To Reduce the Risk of Exposure

The Run Your Tap campaign highlights simple safety precautions that can significantly reduce lead exposure including:

- ▶ Running tap water until it is cold or for at least 30 seconds, until the water is noticeably colder, before drinking, cooking or making baby formula any time a faucet has not been used for several hours; and
- ▶ Using cold tap water for drinking, cooking and making baby formula even after the tap has been running.

More information about the campaign and ways to further reduce exposure can be found at www.nyc.gov/dep. In the event that someone is still concerned after following these

safety precautions, call 311 to request a free lead testing kit from DEP.

Health Effects of Lead

Lead is a common metal found in the environment. In the past, lead has been used in pipes, plumbing fixtures and solder, paints, gasoline and other products. Lead may be found in air, water and soil from past uses of these products. Drinking water is rarely the primary cause of lead poisoning, but elevated lead levels in water can increase a person's total lead exposure. Lead in tap water has declined since 1992, when DEP began anti-pipe corrosion water treatments.

In addition, as in the rest of the country, childhood lead poisoning continues to decline as lead-paint hazards and other lead sources have been reduced. Last year, during the four-month sampling period (June – September 2010) when lead in water levels were slightly elevated, there was a 2.4% decline in the number of young children newly identified with elevated blood lead levels as compared with the same period in 2009. Also, blood lead levels in children have been dropping precipitously over the past several years. Since 1995, there has been a 93% drop in the number of children with elevated blood lead levels from 19,232 cases in 1995 to 1,387 cases in 2009.

Lead poisoning is a preventable health problem and young children are at greatest risk. Lead poisoning may cause learning and behavior problems as well as delays in growth and development in children. In New York City and across the country, peeling lead paint in homes is the primary cause of lead poisoning. Landlords must inspect and safely repair peeling paint if a young child lives at a residence. If a landlord doesn't fix peeling paint, call 311. Children may also be exposed to lead from other sources including, imported consumer products, soil, and water.

How Lead Enters Drinking Water

New York City's drinking water is virtually lead free in the upstate reservoirs and throughout the distribution system. However, lead can enter tap water from solder, fixtures and pipes in the plumbing of some older buildings and homes. When water "sits" for several hours in lead service lines or pipes containing lead, some lead can be released into the water. As a result, the water first drawn from the tap in the morning, or later in the afternoon after returning from work or school, may contain high levels of lead. Regulations have been put in place to reduce the lead in plumbing, yet individual residences may still contain plumbing and fixtures with lead content if they were installed before these rules came into effect.

How the City is Reducing the Risks of Lead in Water

DEP maintains an active program to reduce the quantity of lead that dissolves into water, especially in private homes with lead or lead soldering in pipes. DEP carefully and continuously monitors and adjusts pH levels of water to a specific range that reduces the corrosiveness of the water and adds phosphoric acid—a common food preservative—to create a protective film on pipes that reduces the release of metals, such as lead, from household plumbing.

To Learn More About the Health Effects of Lead

- ▶ Call 311 to request information from the NYC Health Department about the health effects of lead, causes of lead poisoning and how to have a child's blood tested for

lead poisoning.

- ▶ Consult a health care provider to make sure children are tested for lead poisoning at ages 1 and 2 as required by New York State law. Also, talk to a provider about testing older children and pregnant women if they are at risk of lead exposure.

About DEP

DEP manages the city's water supply, providing more than 1 billion gallons of water each day to more than 9 million residents, including 8 million in New York City. New York City's water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, and comprises 19 reservoirs, and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains, tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs and DEP performs rigorous and comprehensive monitoring every day, to ensure that we continue to deliver the healthy, great tasting water that New Yorkers expect. DEP monitors its drinking water for approximately 250 contaminants, approximately 100 of which are not currently required by regulators. DEP performs more than 900 tests daily, 27,000 monthly, and 330,000 on an annual basis from up to 1,000 sampling locations throughout New York City. This work is in addition to 230,000 tests performed in the watershed. For more information, visit www.nyc.gov/dep or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nycwater.

About Health

The New York City Health Department's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program promotes public and private action to reduce children's exposure to lead hazards in the environment. The program works to ensure that children are routinely screened for lead poisoning. It also provides services for lead-poisoned children and pregnant women, as well as their families and health care providers. To learn more about how to prevent lead poisoning, call 311 or visit www.nyc.gov/health.

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