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Second Round of Testing Confirms That Lead Levels Found in Tap Water of Older New York City Homes Has Returned to Normal

Environmental Protection Commissioner Carter Strickland and Health Commissioner Dr. Thomas Farley today announced that the results of a second round of testing for lead levels in drinking water in older New York City homes confirm that lead levels remain normal. The first round of testing, announced in July 2011, also showed that lead levels had returned to normal following an elevated round of sampling in November 2010. At the time of the elevated results, DEP and the 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 a small number of older homes that are known to have lead in their household plumbing. The City monitors lead levels in a sampling of these residences across the five boroughs and provides notifications to all homeowners when levels above EPA standards are found.

"Once again, testing has shown that NYC Water remains the safest and healthiest drink for New Yorkers," said Commissioner Strickland. "Following a small uptick in the levels of lead found at older homes with lead plumbing in 2010, DEP launched a campaign to help New Yorkers follow a few simple steps to reduce their risk. Since then, samples from the homes of hundreds of New Yorkers have shown that the uptick was an aberration, and lead levels have returned to normal for more than a year. Still, any New Yorker who is concerned that older plumbing is contributing lead levels to drinking water should run 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. In addition, residents can call 311 and get a free lead test kit."

"NYC water is safe and is one of the best low-calorie, refreshing beverages available so New Yorkers are encouraged to drink up!" said Commissioner Farley. "Just remember to run your tap water for 30 seconds or until it is cold before drinking or using in food preparation. Running the tap clears the pipes of water that has been sitting overnight or when the tap is off for several hours. Water is rarely the primary cause of lead poisoning, but over time drinking water with elevated lead levels can increase a person's overall lead exposure."

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. In 2010, samplings 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 about the elevation.

Since then, two successive rounds of testing showed a substantial decrease in the number of samplings that exceeded EPA standards. The most recent results, taken from July 1 through December 31, showed that 7.6% (18 samples) of 238 samples were elevated, which is below the 10% threshold. The first round of results, taken from January 1 through June 30, subsequent to the elevated findings in 2010 showed that less than 2% (2 samples) of 114 samples were elevated, also below the 10% threshold. Some fluctuation in sample results is expected throughout the year, particularly for samples taken during the summer as rising temperatures tend to slightly increase lead levels found in at-risk homes. As a result of the two testing rounds that showed lead levels have returned to normal, DEP is no longer required to inform customers of potentially elevated levels of lead on water bills.

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 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 examined 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

Despite the fact that lead levels have returned to normal for two consecutive rounds of testing, it is still recommended that New York City residents follow guidance from the *Run Your Tap* campaign, which 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.
- Ask your landlord if you have a lead service line supplying water to your building or if you own your home have a plumber check the line to see if it is made out of lead. If you have a lead service line, have it replaced with a new service connection that is not made out of lead.

More information about the campaign and ways to further reduce exposure can be found at www.nyc.gov/dep. If you are 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.

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 or search for "lead poisoning prevention program" on www.nyc.gov 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 nine million residents, including eight 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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