



Health & Safety Notes

How to Find Out if Your Drinking Water Is Safe

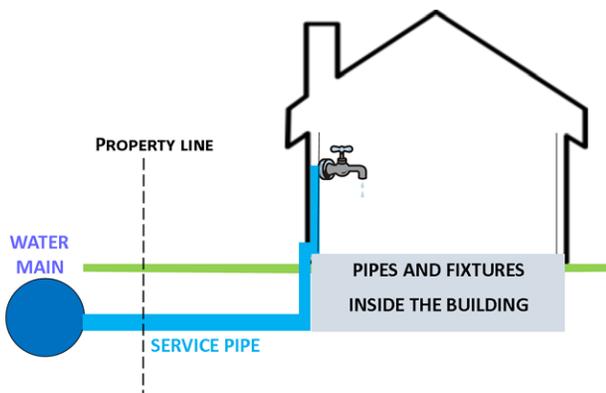
Drinking water is essential for children's health. According to the Healthy Beverages in Child Care Act (AB 2084), all licensed child care programs in California are required to have clean, safe, and accessible water readily available for children to drink throughout the day. Also, as of October 2017, all licensed child care centers in California and any family child care homes participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) must offer water to children throughout the day.

What is done to ensure that drinking water is safe?

Tap water in the United States is generally safe. The Safe Drinking Water Act is a federal law that requires public water companies to test water regularly and meet strict federal standards. Water quality standards in California are even more rigorous than federal standards. Testing for water quality is done annually, and the results are sent to every customer in a Consumer Confidence Report (CCR). You can check the website of your local public water system for a current CCR.

How does tap water get to the faucet?

In most California communities, drinking water comes from a public water system where the water is collected, stored, tested for contaminants, and treated. The water then travels through large pipes (mains). Service lines (laterals) carry water from the mains



to the building. Plumbing pipes carry water to the faucets (taps) inside the building.

What if I get my water from a privately-owned water source?

Some child care providers get their water from ground-water wells, springs, or surface water instead of a public water system. California Community Care Licensing (CCL) regulations require an on-site inspection of privately-owned water sources and a laboratory report that shows the water is safe to drink. Contact your local public health department, the California Department of Public Health, or a licensed commercial laboratory for information about testing your water. Contact your regional child care licensing office for more information about child care regulations: www.cclcd.ca.gov/res/pdf/CCListingMaster.pdf.

How can water get contaminated?

- Water can be contaminated at its source (for example, in reservoirs, groundwater, and rivers). However, public water systems treat this water to make it safe to drink. Water treatment includes removing contaminants and making the water less corrosive to pipes. When water leaves a public water system it is considered safe.
- Water can be contaminated after it leaves the public water system. As water flows through older plumbing, small pieces of lead can flake off of pipes and lead can leach into the water. Also, water standing in pipes or fixtures with lead solder can absorb lead. Homes and buildings built before 1986 are more likely to have pipes, solder, or fixtures that contain lead.

What are the health risks of drinking contaminated water?

Regular exposure to contaminants can cause serious illnesses and developmental problems in children. For example, lead can cause children to have lower IQ scores, learning disabilities, and difficulty paying attention. There is no known level of lead exposure

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that is considered safe, especially for children under age 6. Fortunately, you can test a water sample to find out if it has lead.

How can I get my water tested?

Most likely your water is safe to drink. However, if you are concerned about the safety of the drinking water in your building, a certified laboratory can test the water from individual faucets. The laboratory will either mail you supplies to collect water samples or send a technician to collect samples. Local public health departments, CACFP, or other advocacy groups may provide low-cost or free water testing for families and child care providers with financial need.

To find out more about testing your water:

- Contact your local public water system, or
- Call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791, or
- For a list of Certified Laboratories visit: www.epa.gov/dwlabcert/contact-information-certification-programs-and-certified-laboratories-drinking-water

What else can I do if I'm not sure the water from my tap is safe?

- Use only cold tap water from your faucet. Hot water dissolves lead from pipes more quickly. Generally, it is safer to use only cold tap water for drinking, cooking, and mixing infant formula.
- Clean your faucet screens and aerators which can collect particles and debris.
- If you haven't run the water for six hours, flush the faucets used for cooking or drinking by running the water for 30 seconds. Flush for up to two minutes (or until the water feels cooler) if the building is large or if the water has been sitting in the pipes for days or weeks. Water used to flush pipes can be collected and used for other purposes, such as watering non-edible plants and lawns.
- Consider using a water filter. Filters that are certified for National Safety Foundation (NSF) American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standard 53 remove lead and copper from drinking water. Always check product information labeling, and change filters according to the manufacturer's instructions.

What about drinking bottled water instead of tap water?

If your tap water is safe, there is no reason to buy bottled water. In fact, there are fewer regulations for

testing bottled water than tap water. Many resources go into producing and transporting bottled water. After the water is consumed, even more resources are used in the recycling and disposal process. These activities can harm our environment. In addition, most bottled water does not contain fluoride. Fluoride reduces the risk of tooth decay (cavities).

What about water filters?

Most people do not need to filter their tap water. However, water filters can be used to make water taste better or remove contaminants. Many devices for filtering water are available to consumers including: filter pitchers, small faucet-mounted filters, and "whole-house" filter systems.

- If your water is safe but you simply prefer the taste of filtered water, filter pitchers or faucet-mounted filters may be used. Some filters remove fluoride and other minerals such as calcium and magnesium.
- If you need to filter out contaminants, use a device that is certified by NSF. Not all water filters remove lead. (NSF certified product listings with information about specific contaminants can be found at http://info.nsf.org/Certified/DWTU/listings_leadreduction.asp?ProductFunction=053|Lead+Reduction&ProductFunction=058|Lead+Reduction&ProductType.)

What about water vending machines?

Some consumers use water vending machines to fill their own containers. A water vending machine dispenses tap water with some extra filtering. These machines may become contaminated if they are not properly maintained and inspected. Water from water vending machines may not contain fluoride.

What do I do if my tap water is contaminated?

Do not use contaminated water for drinking, cooking, making formula, or making ice. Instead, use bottled water until you have a reliable filtering system or the underlying problem is fixed (for example, lead free plumbing is installed).

If you participate in CACFP, bottled water or filtering equipment may be allowable costs, but be sure to get approval from your CACFP sponsor or California Department of Education nutrition consultant before making any purchases. If you find your water contains lead, notify the families of the children you care for so that their blood lead levels can be tested. Your local public health department can assist with testing children for lead.

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References & Resources

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