

## Now Is the Time to Reduce Lead Exposure

**I**ncreased concern about lead in drinking water in the wake of the crisis in Flint, Michigan, offers society the opportunity to reduce lead exposure at the tap. It is time to redouble our efforts to end childhood lead poisoning, and to make drinking water source protection, treatment, and distribution true priorities that impact decisions made by government at every level and by all of us who consume water as part of daily life. Increased oversight, innovation, and investment can reduce lead at the tap and prepare us to meet other drinking water challenges.

We need to ensure that the current Lead and Copper Rule, pro-pounded under the Safe Drinking Water Act, is being implemented properly. Last year, EPA announced increased oversight of state agencies responsible for implementing the LCR and updated protocols in a number of areas, including sampling location and methods, corrosion control treatment, and transparency between utilities and communities. EPA also directed states to work with water systems to update the inventory of lead in their distribution systems. This will result in more attention being paid to lead at the tap and to identifying treatment issues or other problems that are resulting in increased exposure.

Then EPA needs to revise the LCR, an effort in which the agency has been engaged for quite some time and which will result in a proposed revision later this year. EPA should update and provide clear requirements for monitoring programs, including where samples are taken and the protocols for taking them. A revised rule should improve how public education programs are conducted, because unlike as with most other contaminants, action in the home or

building is critical to reducing lead exposure.

EPA has also committed to setting a Household Action Level, which would be an amount of lead that, if found in a sample, should prompt not only an investigation to find the source of contamination but also notification of local health officials. EPA should also require water systems to inventory sources of lead in their distribution systems, including lead service lines, and to replace them within a certain amount of time.

The best way to reduce exposure to lead at the tap is to reduce the amount of the metal in contact with water. The largest such source is the lead service line, which carries water from the main under the street to the home or commercial building. There are calls from policymakers, consumers, and others to replace them more quickly than a revised LCR could.

Successful programs require community stakeholders to work together, and there are case studies demonstrating that it can be done. Clean Water Action is working with the Lead Service Line Replacement Collaborative, a diverse group of organizations including water systems, public health and environmental organizations, and others who plan to accelerate this process by providing tools to help communities develop programs for full lead service line replacement.

Lead exposure is most dangerous for children under the age of six, and childhood lead poisoning remains a serious issue in this country. The crisis in Flint should prompt us to ensure that lead hazard prevention programs are well-resourced and that federal, state, and local health programs

prioritize childhood lead poisoning prevention while recognizing water as a prominent potential source of exposure.

Preventing future Flints is not just about preventing lead exposure at the tap. The high quality of drinking water in the United States has led Americans to undervalue the complicated tasks of protecting, treating, and distributing drinking water. For example, contaminants that pose health risks in drinking water are often the result of pollution that should be controlled where it occurs, at the groundwater or surface water source. Instead, this burden is too often passed on to treatment plants. The costs of removing contamination are thus being borne by water systems and their consumers. The Clean Water

Act and other programs thus need to focus on drinking water protection and public health protection.

An overarching program for preventing lead exposure at the tap and for cleaner drinking water overall should

include promoting sustainable water systems supported by a robust research program, an emphasis on innovation, and ample oversight at the federal and state levels to meet the Safe Drinking Water Act goals of reducing public health risk from drinking water. Political uncertainty in light of recent events should not distract us from these goals.



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