

# GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

## Department of Health

Office of the Director



26 Feb 2004

Dear Resident:

The District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (WASA) has identified your residence as one of approximately 23,000 probably having an underground lead service pipe that brings drinking water into your residence from the water mains under the streets. WASA has tested approximately 6,000 of these residences and found that about two-thirds of these residences are above the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Action Level for lead of 15 parts per billion (ppb), and one-third are below the Action Level. At this time, however, the Department of Health is not certain that a DC residence with a lead service line that tests below this EPA Action Level at any given time is always below this Action Level. Therefore, **out of an abundance of caution** the Department of Health is providing advice in this letter for all residences which have lead service pipes, and specific advice for all children under the age of six years and women who are pregnant living in these approximately 23,000 residences.

When your water is not used for a period of time, such as overnight, it may pick up increased amounts of lead from the lead service line or from your internal home plumbing. According to WASA and EPA, recommended efforts to decrease lead in this water include:

- *Use tap water for drinking or cooking only after other high water use activities, such as bathing, showering, flushing the toilet, or washing your clothes, so that a total of at least 10 minutes of running water from your faucets or pipes has occurred. This high water usage should let the water that was in contact with the underground lead service pipe pass through your home's plumbing.*
- *After this 10 minutes of use, let the water run from your kitchen faucet for 60 seconds, then collect drinking water in containers and store them in the refrigerator. About once a month, remove and clean the strainer/aerator device on your faucet to remove debris.*
- *Cold water should be used for drinking or cooking, as hot water will contain higher levels of lead. Cold water should be heated for making hot beverages or cooking. Do not use the water from the hot water faucet for drinking or cooking.*

### **Recommendations for children under six and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding**

Your residence has been identified as one of 23,000 likely to have a lead service line, and your tap water may contain elevated levels of lead. Young children under six and unborn babies are especially vulnerable to the damaging effects of lead. Therefore, given our current state of information, we make the following additional recommendations. **Children under six years and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should not drink unfiltered water, or use it to prepare infant formula or concentrated juice, in any of these 23,000 residences until the concerns regarding the lead levels in the water have been resolved.** We encourage continued breastfeeding, but at the same time recommend taking measures to avoid unfiltered water. We recommend that all children under six, and women who are pregnant, be screened for blood lead

levels. To obtain free blood lead level testing through our Department of Health laboratory you can contact the Department of Health at (202) 671-0733. We ask that results of blood lead levels performed at other laboratories be provided to the Department of Health. The results of these blood tests will be analyzed by the Department of Health to see if there is a relationship between specific water lead levels and blood lead levels. Based on this information we may be able to reevaluate our recommendations about water precautions in these 23,000 residences.

### **Filters to remove lead from the water, and bottled water: 2 ways to decrease lead exposure**

If you decide to purchase a home drinking water filter, please make sure that the option you choose is certified to remove lead. Although the DC Department of Health does not certify nor endorse specific home drinking water treatment filters, you should purchase a treatment filter certified to remove lead by an independent testing organization, such as the National Sanitation Foundation International ([www.nsf.org/certified/DWTU](http://www.nsf.org/certified/DWTU)) or the California Dept. of Health Services ([www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/ps/ddwem/technical/certification/devices.html](http://www.dhs.cahwnet.gov/ps/ddwem/technical/certification/devices.html)). Consider choosing a water treatment filter, called a "point-of-use" filter, that can be installed on your kitchen faucet or other site of drinking water. "Point-of-use" filters must be properly installed and operated according to manufacturers' instructions." Another option is a water pitcher specifically certified to remove lead.

Since not all bottled water is systematically tested for lead, if you decide to use bottled water you should use water that has been certified to be below the EPA Action Level for lead by organizations such as the International Bottled Water Association or the National Sanitation Foundation. You may wish to visit EPA's website [www.epa.gov/region3/leaddc.htm](http://www.epa.gov/region3/leaddc.htm) for information on lead in drinking water, or contact the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

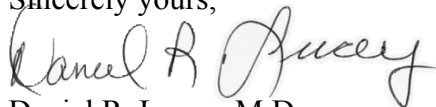
### **Lead paint can be another very important source of lead-exposure in the home**

Lead paint was used prior to 1978 to paint the interior of homes, and exterior woodwork such as windows, doors, and porches. Lead paint is the most commonly identified cause of a child having an elevated blood lead level. Therefore, any of the residences in which a person is found to have an elevated blood lead level must also be tested for the presence of lead-based paint. Together we can work to get the lead out of DC homes. Peeling or flaking paint should be considered hazardous to a child until the paint is tested. Lead-based paint dust is hazardous if inhaled or ingested.

Remember: lead can cause harm to the developing brain of an unborn baby or young child, to the red blood cells that carry our oxygen, to the kidneys, and to other parts of the body. Current medications are effective only when the blood lead levels are very high, as occurs much more often from lead in paint than lead in drinking water.

We will continue to communicate with you as we obtain more information from ongoing tests of water and blood lead levels. We will keep you informed of any updated recommendations based on these ongoing tests. Our primary concern is your health and that of all the people of the District of Columbia.

Sincerely yours,



Daniel R. Lucey, M.D.  
Interim Chief Medical Officer