# Lead in drinking water

**Small quantities of lead can sometimes be found in tap water as a result of the water coming into contact with lead in old plumbing systems. It can be absorbed from the lead piping itself and, to a lesser degree, from soldered joints.**

## The regulatory standard

There is little or no lead in water as it leaves water treatment works. The current UK regulatory standard for lead in drinking water, as set out in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2000, is 25ug/l (micrograms per litre).

Medical advice suggests that lead can accumulate in the body and can be detrimental to health. Therefore it is sensible to ensure that as little lead as possible is consumed in a lifetime. As a consequence, in order to further minimise human exposure, the standard for lead will be reduced to 10ug/l in 2013.

There have been significant reductions in exposure to lead from drinking water during recent years. Waters that have potential to pick up lead from pipes have been identified and treated to reduce this potential.

## Have you got lead pipes?

Until 1970 some domestic water pipes were made of lead, therefore all, or part of, the service pipe connecting the water main in the street to your kitchen tap may be made of lead.

If you are unsure, you can make a simple check. Find the pipe entering your home and trace it to the kitchen tap, then locate as much pipe work as possible. Unpainted lead pipes are soft and dull grey in colour; scrape this surface gently, if the metal appears shiny and silver beneath, it is likely to be lead.

Other pipe materials in common use are:

- Copper - hard, bright when scratched, otherwise dull brown
- Iron - dark, very hard and may be rusty
- Plastic - may be grey, black or blue

## Who is responsible for the pipe work?

You are responsible for the entire length of the service pipe from your house, right the way to the boundary of the street in which our main is laid (or to the main itself if our main is not laid in the street).

**Relevant facts:**

**Historically**, the major source of human exposure to lead was via petrol engines and paint.

Exposure to high levels of lead has been shown to have adverse effects on human health.

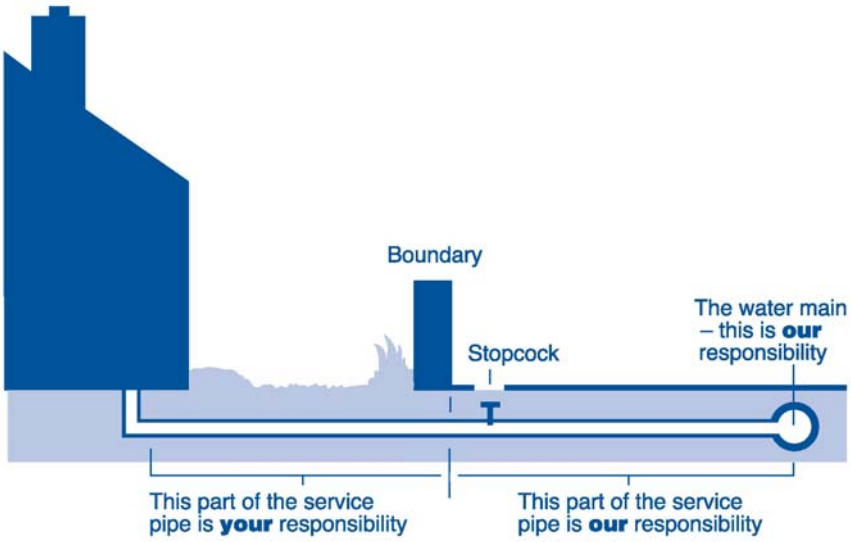
Some types of water, particularly upland **soft water has a greater potential to pick up lead from pipes.**

If your house was built or had its pipe work fully replaced **after 1970** it is unlikely to contain lead pipes.

Water supply byelaws and more recently the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999, have **banned the use of lead solder with pipe work used for drinking water** throughout England and Wales for over 15 years.

**Lead solder can still be safely used for some plumbing works** where the water is not used for drinking or cooking, such as in closed circuit heating systems.

**Grants may be available** for renovation and minor works for certain households. Information about this can be obtained from your local council.




If the **length of lead pipes** exceeds 40 metres, more than a bowlful of water will need to be drawn off.

Make sure that removing lead water pipes does not reduce electrical safety; **water pipes were once commonly used to 'earth' properties**, so if you plan to replace water pipes, discuss this with your plumber or ask your electricity supplier or an electrician.

Although lead levels in drinking water are typically lower than ever. The best way to minimise your exposure to lead in drinking water is to remove any lead pipe work and lead solder joints you discover.

## What can you do to minimise your exposure to lead?

Ultimately the best way to minimise your exposure to lead in drinking water is to remove any lead pipe work and lead solder joints you discover.

If you have lead pipe work, you can minimise your exposure in the short term by taking some simple precautions.

If water has been standing in the lead pipe for long periods, for example overnight, or if no one has used it for several hours, draw off a washing-up bowlful of water from the kitchen tap to clear the standing water. This can be used to water the garden or for something other than drinking or cooking.

If you decide to replace your lead pipes, we will replace our part free of charge. We will need at least four weeks notice so that we can make the necessary arrangements for our work.

## Further advice

If you have any further queries regarding water quality or require further information, please contact us on the freephone number below.

Customer services helpline: 0800 169 1144, Minicom: 0800 169 9965