

facts on lead in drinking water

is there lead in our drinking water?

Whilst the water supplied by Severn Trent Water is virtually lead free, lead can be picked up if it passes through a lead service pipe which connects the water main in the road to the house. The house owner will own the part of the service pipe between the public highway boundary up to and including inside the property.

Lead can also be picked up from any lead pipework and lead-based soldered pipe joints inside the house. Lead has not been used for service pipe construction since the 1960s, so most houses built since then are likely to have plastic or copper pipes.

what are the lead limits?

From 1st January 2004, the UK standard for the concentration of lead in drinking water has been reduced to a maximum of 25 parts per billion (ug/l). The standard applies to cold water drawn from the tap used for normal drinking water purposes.

Whilst there is no short-term risk to health from lead at these levels, the Department of Health advises that action should be taken to reduce lead in water to the lowest possible levels. This is particularly important if the water is regularly drunk by young children or anyone who is pregnant.

Severn Trent Water is obliged to tell the customer, our Regulators, and the Environmental Health Department of the local Council, if we find lead in excess of 25 ug/l in the drinking water at any house during the course of our water quality sampling programme.

what does Severn Trent Water do about lead?

We take very seriously the suggestion of any risk to health.

We treat the water we supply to reduce its ability to dissolve lead, and this has generally been very successful. Of the thousands of samples we take for lead only a very few exceed 25 ug/l, and the majority of samples already meet the tighter standard of 10 ug/l which comes into force in 2013.

We continue to monitor lead levels closely and will introduce further treatment if this proves necessary.

should I have my water analysed for lead?

We are happy to advise whether the lead level in your water supply is likely to be significant, based on our extensive sampling records from houses in each water supply zone. These records are also accessible on our website (www.stwater.co.uk).

Alternatively, if you have a lead service pipe or plumbing and you are concerned about the level of lead in your water we can arrange for samples to be taken to help decide on the actions needed to reduce lead levels to your property.

how can I reduce lead levels?

If you have a lead service pipe or lead plumbing, there are three main ways you can do this:

replace any lead piping

This is the most effective method. Some households may have a lead service pipe that they share with neighbours. If you and they agree to have it replaced, it is beneficial to replace it with separate pipes to each property. ➤



Some local Councils, usually through their Environmental Health departments, may offer grants towards the cost of replacement of lead services. However, this is a matter between individual property owners and the local Council. Severn Trent cannot advise on grant issues.

For its part, Severn Trent will normally provide free new separate connections providing separate services are laid to a specified position. If you consider doing this then please contact us initially on 0800 783 4444 so we can advise on what may be involved and if it is possible.

water use

Do not drink water that has been standing in the pipes for long periods. Let a bowlful run from your tap to clear the water standing in the pipe, and use it for purposes other than drinking or cooking. Alternatively, flushing the toilet should draw fresh water through the pipes.

water filters

As a short-term measure, some water filters can remove traces of lead, provided the cartridges are changed regularly. Customers should adhere to manufacturers' instructions, and ensure that the filter is designed to remove lead. For more information, please see facts on home water filters.

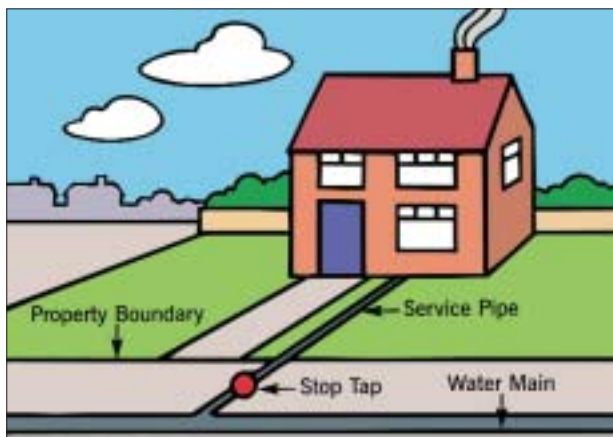
All of these actions will reduce lead levels. However, to eliminate lead completely, replacement of the lead pipes is the only long-term solution.

if I have no lead pipes can I be sure the water is lead-free?

Usually, yes. However, some joints connecting copper pipes might contain lead-based solder, which can leach lead, particularly when new. Lead solder does not comply with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations, so if moving into a new house or having plumbing work carried out, check to make sure lead-free soldered joints were used.

whose responsibility is it to replace lead pipes?

In most cases, that part of the service pipe linking the water main to the stop tap in the pavement belongs to Severn Trent Water. However, the part of the service pipe that links the stop tap in the public highway boundary to the house belongs to the house owner, who is responsible for its condition and maintenance.



If the 25 ug/l standard is exceeded in a sample, we undertake a follow-up investigation, and if a repeat sample taken from the property also exceeds 25 ug/l then Severn Trent Water must replace any lead pipes that it is responsible for and advise the customer that it has done so.

Alternatively, irrespective of the level of lead, the customer can choose to replace their part of the lead service pipe, and if formally notified in writing, we will replace our part of the lead pipe free of charge.

All lead plumbing inside the house is the responsibility of the house owner. Therefore, replacement of the part of the lead service pipe between the public highway boundary and the property, and all internal plumbing is the house owner's responsibility.