

Huron County



Public Health

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Tim Hollinger, MPH
Health Commissioner

Business Address:

180 Milan Ave., Suite 8
Norwalk, Ohio 44857

Phone/Fax:

Phone: (419) 668-1652
Medical Fax: (419) 663-1809
Environmental Fax:
(567) 244-3201
Community Health Fax:
(419) 668-0152

Email:

information@
huroncohealth.com

Online:

www.huroncohealth.com

CLINIC LOCATIONS:

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Contact:

Jessica Colvin, Public Information Officer
Huron County Public Health
180 Milan Avenue
Norwalk, Ohio 44857
Phone: 419-668-1652, ext: 234
jcolvin@huroncohealth.com

August 24th, 2016

**Voluntary Water Quality Testing Spurs School District Action:
Affected Water Fixtures Shutdown**

Norwalk, Ohio—As part of a proactive safety measure to ensure the well-being of both students and staff, Norwalk City School District completed a voluntary, randomly-sampled test of its water quality.

“Nothing is more important to the Norwalk City School District than the safety and health of its students and staff,” said Superintendent George Fisk when discussing the decision to test the school district’s water.

Events concerning lead and the quality of drinking water in schools were front and center in many national news reports during the 2015-2016 school year. These events prompted the school district to test its own water quality as a safety precaution.

This summer, the Norwalk City School District contracted with a private company, Pardee Environmental, to test the district’s water quality. On August 15, 2016, 78 samples were taken from various drinking fountains and faucets throughout the district’s school buildings. Test results were returned to the school district on August 19, 2016, finding that 10 of the 78 samples tested contained elevated levels of lead.

The EPA recommends action should be taken if samples exceed 15 parts per billion (ppb). Immediately upon receiving the results, all affected drinking fountains and faucets were shutdown, and as an added precaution, all similar styled drinking fountain and faucet fixtures have also been shutdown. The Norwalk City School District is taking the matter seriously and working with local partners to effectively address the issue.

Sample Test Results

School	Number of Samples Taken	Number of Samples Flagged* *15 PPB or higher
Maplehurst Elementary	10	2
League Elementary	8	1
Main Street Intermediate	9	5
Pleasant Elementary	13	1
Norwalk Middle School	7	1

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Norwalk High School	31	0
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School District’s Response

In cooperation with local partners, the City of Norwalk, Fisher-Titus Medical Center (FTMC) and Huron County Public Health (HCPH), Norwalk City School District is responding to the situation, by taking the following action steps:

- “100% of the identified fountains over the threshold were shut down before school started”, said Superintendent George Fisk.
- Many of the affected fountains and faucets have already been replaced while others are in the process of being replaced; even if not identified by testing. All replaced fixtures will remain shut down until retesting can be completed.
- Partnering with HCPH to complete a comprehensive retesting of water fixtures to ensure safe and accurate results. Testing will be conducted on Maplehurst Elementary, League Elementary, Pleasant Elementary, Norwalk Middle School, and Main Street Intermediate. Norwalk High School will not be retested due to the test results showing no elevated levels of lead as well as the newness of the building and its water fixtures.
- Norwalk City School District will conduct annual testing to ensure the continued safety of students and staff members.
- Providing safe sources of drinking water for student and staff in areas where water fountains and faucets have been shut down. Students are also permitted to bring their own water bottles until further notice.
- Making blood lead testing for students available through HCPH. Testing can also be requested through New Beginnings Pediatrics and some other primary care physicians at their own expense. Specific information about testing locations, dates, and times will be available to parents as soon as they are finalized.

City of Norwalk Water Supply

“The City of Norwalk conducted its EPA-mandated lead and copper testing this summer. Following EPA protocols, samples were collected at 30 residences. The results indicated that the city’s water is under compliance with the Lead and Copper Rule,” said Josh Snyder, Public Works Director.

Because the school’s water fountains and faucets serviced by the same water lines were tested and returned varying test results, the issue is believed to be contained within individual water fixtures (i.e. drinking fountains and sinks), and NOT an issue with the water supply or the pipes servicing the building.

Information for Parents and Staff

Lead can cause serious health problems if too much enters your body from drinking water or other sources. It can cause damage to the brain and kidneys, and can interfere with the production of red blood cells that carry oxygen to all parts of your body. The greatest risk of lead exposure is to infants, young children, pregnant women, or nursing women.

“Children 0-6 years old are at a greater risk for the health effects of lead. Primary exposure of lead is not through drinking water, but through lead dust and particles in older homes,” said Dr. Shankar Kurra, Sr. Vice President, Medical Affairs at Fisher-Titus Medical Center.

Scientists have linked the effects of lead on the brain with lowered IQ in children. Adults with kidney problems and high blood pressure can be affected by low levels of lead more than healthy adults. Lead is stored in the bones and it can be released later in life. During pregnancy, the child receives lead from the mother’s bones, which may affect brain development.

How to Limit Exposure to Lead

EPA estimates that drinking water can make up 20% or more of a person's total exposure to lead. It is important to recognize all the ways a child can be exposed to lead and limit the risk.

- Interior painted areas— Examine walls and interior surfaces to see if the paint is cracking, chipping, or peeling, and check areas on doors or windows where painted surfaces may rub together.
- Exterior painted areas— Check exterior paint as well; it can flake off and contaminate nearby soil where children may play.
- Surrounding areas— Be sure there are no large structures nearby with peeling or flaking paint that could contaminate the soil around play areas.
- Cleaning practices—Parents should encourage children to wash their hands thoroughly after playing outside and before eating or sleeping. Human skin does not absorb lead in water.
- Play areas— Look to see if areas where children play are dust-free and clean. Outside, check for bare soil and test for lead.
- Painted toys and furniture— Make sure the paint is not cracking, chipping, or peeling.

“I am appreciative of the Norwalk City School District for taking the voluntary step to test their water for lead. This way we are able to address any lead exposure to our most vulnerable population, the kids,” said Tim Hollinger, Huron County Health Commissioner.

If you are concerned about high levels of lead in your home's drinking water you can contact HCPH to have your water tested by calling 419-668-1652.

Norwalk City School District, the City of Norwalk, Fisher-Titus Medical Center, and Huron County Public Health are working together to protect the health of the community. More information regarding lead safety can be found at www.HuronCoHealth.com/Lead.

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