

## lead in drinking water

how does lead get into my tap?

Water leaving Hartlepool Water treatment works and flowing through our mains network is effectively lead-free.

Where lead is found in tap water it usually comes from old lead pipework in, or near the home. The longer water is left to stand in these pipes the more likely it is that traces of lead will be found in the water.

In addition, deposits containing lead can build up in pipes and may occasionally be dislodged.

lead and your health

Awareness of the levels of lead in the environment has increased during recent years, with many of us now using lead-free petrol and avoiding lead paints.

Medical advice suggests that lead may be harmful if excessive levels are taken into the body. It is therefore sensible to ensure that as little lead as possible is consumed. This is especially important for pregnant women and young children.

Do I have lead pipework?

Lead has been used as a plumbing material since roman times. If you live in a house built before 1970, you may wish to check whether your pipework is lead. Properties built or modified after 1970 are unlikely to have lead pipes – copper or plastics are now the most commonly used materials.

To check your pipework you should do the following:

Look for the point where the water pipe enters the house and check as much of the pipe's length as possible. The pipe usually enters at the internal stop tap – which is often under the kitchen sink. Lead pipes are usually dark grey or black (unless painted) and the joints appear to be 'swollen'. The metal is soft with a dull coating and when scraped gently with a coin, a shiny silver strip should be revealed.

If your home has been replumbed, it is still worth checking the pipe running from the water main outside your property to the stop tap inside your home. You should first scrape the pipe under your sink but if you are still unable to tell, you can scrape the pipe either side of your outside stop tap.

As a guide, other materials have the following appearances:

Copper - bright or dull orange colour and hard

Iron - dark, very hard and may be rusty

Plastic - may be grey, black or blue

how likely is my tap water to dissolve lead?

Water in the Hartlepool Water region is hard. Hard water has its critics, but one of the main benefits is that it is less likely to dissolve lead. However, we have tested our water supplies for their ability to dissolve lead and where tests have shown that there could be a problem; we have introduced additional treatment at our works.

We perform many tests on water quality every year. If you have lead pipes or would like us to measure the lead content of your tap water we would be happy to do so.

I've got lead pipes, what can I do to reduce lead levels?

If lead pipes are causing high lead levels in your tap water you can take some simple precautions:

- Only use water from the kitchen cold tap for drinking and cooking purposes
- Do not use water from any hot taps for drinking or cooking purposes as hot water dissolves more lead than cold water
- Do not drink or cook with water that has stood for a long time in the pipes. As a guide, this means water standing overnight, or for several hours during the day. Run the cold tap to flush the water out. For a typical property, where the street is no more than 40 metres from the tap, filling a washing bowl is advisable. You can collect this water for watering house plants or for use in the garden.

#### Ownership of pipes

Pipes under the road or pavements up to the boundary of the street in which the water main is situated is the responsibility of Hartlepool Water and in most cases the pipes are not lead. The pipe from the street boundary to the internal stop tap and all internal plumbing, is the responsibility of the owner.

If you opt to replace the lead pipework on the property, Hartlepool Water will ensure that any lead pipework between the water main and the boundary of the street in which the main is situated is replaced free of charge.

Grants maybe available for renovation and minor works for households with low income. Information about this should be obtained from your local authority.

where can I get more advice?

If you are still unsure about what lead pipes are like, or would like further information about lead in the water supply, call 01429 858050 and we will be happy to help you.

Your Environmental Health Officer can also give advice.

Qualified plumbers registered with the Institute of Plumbing can assist with pipe replacement.

The Drinking Water Inspectorate has also published an information leaflet on lead – Call 020 7082 8024 for a copy or visit their website – [www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk)

Further information can be found on our website:  
[www.hartlepoolwater.co.uk](http://www.hartlepoolwater.co.uk)