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CONTACT:

Neil Shader, DEP, 717-787-1323

Amy Worden, Department of Health, 717-787-1783

Wolf Administration Highlights Steps to Reduce Lead Exposure

HARRISBURG, PA -- National events about lead exposure have generated new concerns for Pennsylvanians related to the safety of their homes and water. The Wolf Administration takes the issue of lead exposure very seriously and state agencies will continue to work together on their coordinated response to address lead exposure in communities across the commonwealth. The Departments of Health (DOH) and Environmental Protection (DEP) both work diligently to protect children from lead exposure and have many resources available for residents to learn more and take action on lead.

According to Department of Health, the primary source of childhood lead poisoning in Pennsylvania continues to be exposure to aging, deteriorating lead-based paint (chips and dust), and not drinking water. The age of Pennsylvania's housing stock contributes to this problem. While lead was banned from paint in 1978, many older dwellings still contain layers of pre-1978 paint. According to 2010 Census data, Pennsylvania ranks third in the nation for having the most housing units identified as having been built before 1950 (when lead was more prevalent) and fourth in the nation for housing units identified as having been built before 1978, according to a [2014 Department of Health report](#).

“The Department of Health is very concerned about elevated lead levels in children wherever they may occur. Our community health nurses work closely with health care providers and families every day to provide education about lead exposure and facilitate home inspections if needed to identify the source of the exposure,” said Health Secretary Dr. Karen Murphy.

“Protecting the state's water and the health and safety of our citizens is DEP's mission,” said Department of Environmental Protection Secretary John Quigley. “Ensuring the safety of our drinking water is essential. We have policies and programs in place already to protect Pennsylvanians.”

Department of Health

The Department of Health provides a toll-free [Lead Information Line](#) (1-800-440-LEAD) to respond to caller questions and provide electronic materials about lead poisoning and other environmental hazards. For more information, please also visit the [Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention FAQ](#).

Residents should be proactive and follow steps to ensure the health and the safety of children in their residences and can find all the resources DOH provides [here](#). DOH's Lead Surveillance Program tracks and monitors childhood lead activity through the Pennsylvania National Electronic Disease Surveillance System (PA-NEDSS). PA-NEDSS is a web-based application system that receives all lead reports on Pennsylvania's children. Through PA-NEDSS, the Division of Child and Adult Health Services can identify possible high-risk areas, locate areas of under-testing, and identify other potential service gaps.

DOH's Community Health Nurses (CHN) monitor elevated lead levels in children ages seven and under living in Pennsylvania. The CHNs contact the family to provide education on laboratory results, sources of lead exposure, actions to take to prevent/decrease the risk of exposure and help facilitate follow-up testing between client's and their pediatricians. In cases where there is significant lead exposure, CHNs will work with the pediatrician and facilitate referrals to obtain home inspections which can identify the source of exposure as well as provide hands-on education to parents.

Department of Environment Protection

Federal and state regulations require that public drinking water suppliers regularly test for contaminants including lead. DEP monitors water suppliers to ensure that they are complying with testing requirements to safeguard our public drinking water supplies. DEP also provides information to private well water users on how to properly maintain their systems to reduce their exposure to lead. DEP has created a new section of their website for information on lead in drinking water for consumers [here](#).

Since lead exposure in drinking water typically comes from your plumbing fixtures and not the source of your water supply, it's important for both public drinking water customers as well as private well water users to follow these tips to reduce your exposure to lead:

Run your water to flush out lead. If water hasn't been used for several hours, run water for 15-30 seconds or until it becomes cold or reaches a steady temperature before using it for drinking or cooking. This flushes out any stagnant water in your home plumbing and replaces it with fresh water from the water main in your street.

Use cold water for cooking and preparing baby formula. Do not cook with or drink water from the hot water tap; lead dissolves more easily into hot water. Do not use water from the hot water tap to make baby formula.

Do not boil water to remove lead. Boiling water will not reduce lead. In fact, lead concentrations will be higher in water that is boiled since some of the water is removed as steam.

Test your water for lead. Contact your water system for more information about getting your water tested. Some water systems may offer to test your water free of charge. Your water system can also provide information about local laboratories that conduct lead testing. If you're a private well water user, you should contact a DEP-accredited lab for information about water testing. [Here is the link](#) to a listing of DEP-accredited labs.

Identify whether your house's plumbing fixtures contain lead. There are lead check swabs that can detect lead on plumbing surfaces such as solder and pipes. These swabs can be purchased at plumbing and home improvement stores.

Monitoring frequencies for lead and copper vary based on previous sample results. A new water system is tested every 6 months until they have 2 consecutive periods of compliance (so it could be the first 2 tests); after that they go to annual monitoring, and if, after 3 years of clean annual tests, they can go to a once-every-three year monitoring schedule. All large water systems (serving more than 50,000) and those small/medium water systems that have installed corrosion control treatment are also required to monitor for water quality parameters to ensure that corrosion control treatment is being properly operated and maintained.

If lead concentrations exceed the legally acceptable level in more than 10% of customer taps sampled, the system must undertake a number of additional actions to control corrosion. These actions include completion of a corrosion control treatment feasibility study, submission of a permit application, and construction or modification of corrosion control treatment facilities. If the action level for lead is exceeded, the system must also inform the public about steps they should take to protect their health and may have to replace lead service lines under their control.

If lead action level is exceeded, public water systems are required to implement a public education program within 60 days. Printed materials must be delivered to all customers, the local or state health department, and other organizations. In addition, water suppliers must provide the results of all lead testing performed on individual homes to the homeowner within 30 days, along with an explanation of the health effects of lead, a list of steps consumers can take to reduce exposure to lead, and contact info for the water system.