

## Frequently asked questions regarding lead and lead sampling

Q: Why was the water at Fort Polk's Child Care facilities and schools sampled for lead?

A: Because the presence of lead in drinking water can cause health problems in children, the Installation Management Command directed that its 37 installations carry out Army-wide, comprehensive chemical surveys of all sources of drinking water in schools and child-care facilities.

Q: Who did the testing and how wide was the sampling?

A: Water samples from 149 separate locations of drinking water sources in schools and child-care facilities were tested. Carried out jointly by the Medical Activities Department of Preventive Medicine; the Directorate of Family Morale, Welfare and Recreation; and the Directorate of Public Works Environmental Division; sampling was completed Aug. 6 and test results received at Fort Polk Sept. 3.

Q: Why was testing limited only to schools and childcare facilities?

A: Sampling was conducted at CDCs because exposure to lead, even at low levels, may cause developmental issues in children ages 6 years and under. Lead is found throughout the environment in lead-based paint, air, soil, household dust, food, certain types of pottery, porcelain, pewter, and water. The primary source of lead exposure for most children is lead-based paint in older homes, but since exposure can also occur through drinking water, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) suggests that schools and day care facilities test their drinking water for lead. If lead is found at any water outlet at levels above 20 ppb, the EPA recommends taking action to reduce the lead concentration.

Q: Why are we concerned about lead exposure in water?

A: The greatest risk to children is brain development and irreversible damage may occur if levels are elevated. Children under age 6 years are more susceptible to the toxic effects of lead.

Q: Before the testing that took place in August, when was the last sampling taken at those facilities?

A: This is the first comprehensive effort at IMCOM installations to carry out a test program looking "within" high risk buildings for lead levels in drinking water.

Q: How are you going to find out where the lead came from?

A: This first round of August testing was designed to identify "suspect" devices (such as drinking water fountains and faucets). Each of the suspect devices at Fort Polk CDCs and schools has now been removed from service. IMCOM is now preparing for a second round of sampling/testing designed to validate/confirm the suspect sources and then remove those from service.

Q: How does lead get into our water?

A: Lead contamination generally occurs from the corrosion of lead pipes in a home or building's plumbing system. Lead is present in some kinds of drinking water fountains, the solder used to connect pieces of copper piping, in some storage tanks and cooling reservoirs, and sediments in screens on faucets may contain lead. The age and condition of plumbing fixtures can increase the rate at which lead is released into the water.

Q: Where does Fort Polk obtain its water?

A: Fort Polk's drinking water is pumped from sandy aquifers located more than 700 feet below the surface. These naturally occurring water bearing sands produce a water of exceptionally good quality with natural lead levels below laboratory detection limits. Our water plants produce a water of neutral acidity level which helps to slow down the release of lead from plumbing fixtures into the drinking water. The sources of any lead levels in Fort Polk's drinking water are located within the plumbing and fixtures of individual buildings as described in the answer to the question above.

Q: Is this testing a "one time" event?

A: Although the Installation Management Command has not indicated that this testing program will be repeated, given the value of the information derived and benefits for our children, we are expecting continued testing events in the future. In fact, the EPA has stated that their recommendation is to Test-Train-Tell in order to keep lead levels under control. The "Train" component refers to training school and childcare employees to perform timely maintenance and flushing of water lines; the "Tell" component refers to publishing the test results so that parents and guardians will be aware of this issue.

Q: What is lead poisoning?

A: This occurs when lead, a metal, builds up in a person's body

Q: What are the symptoms of lead poisoning?

A: Most children will have no symptoms and that is why it is important to screen children who are at risk for this. If a child has symptoms, they are nonspecific. Symptoms can include fatigue, vomiting, cognitive impairment, language delay, abdominal pain and others.

Q: Is there a test for this?

A: Yes, it is a blood test that requires a venous sample and not just a finger stick. Test is positive if lead level is above 5 mcg/dl in a child.

Q: Is there a treatment for lead poisoning?

A: Treatment is advised for higher levels above 45 mcg/dl. It is a medication that helps pull lead out of the body.

Q: Is there an association with anemia?

A: Lead poisoning can rarely result in anemia, which is low hemoglobin levels. The occurrence of iron deficiency and lead poisoning together is worse than either alone. The lead is better absorbed in children with an iron deficiency than in those with normal hemoglobin levels. In the event that your child tests positive for lead, further blood work may be required to rule out iron deficiency.

Q: What if I am pregnant and have been exposed to lead in water?

A: CDC recommends screening pregnant women with a risk factor for lead exposure and lead contaminated water is a risk factor. If under 5 mcg/dl, nothing needs to be done. If 5 mcg/dl or above, the baby should be tested for lead soon after birth.

Q: What about lead levels in drinking water in my quarters?

A: IMCOM is aware that many posts have privatized their housing; and is currently developing policy to address the issue of testing for lead levels in interior plumbing systems of family housing units -- both government and privatized housing areas.

Q: Does using a water filter prevent lead poisoning?

A: Most commonly available home filters do not efficiently remove heavy metals, so most likely not.

Q: Am I safe to wash my hands in this water?

A: Yes. Bathing, showering, and washing dishes or clothes should be safe for you and your children since lead is not absorbed through the skin. The primary route of lead exposure is through ingestion.

Q: Who do I call for more information?

A: MAJ Billy McPherson, MEDDAC, Department of Preventive Medicine at 531-7961.