



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **North Dakota Department of Health's Lead Surveillance Programs Protect the Public**

BISMARCK – The news from Flint, Michigan, regarding lead in drinking water has drawn national attention to adverse health effects related to lead exposure. The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) assures residents that the lead problems facing Flint are not likely to happen in North Dakota, although North Dakota residents can be exposed to other sources of lead that are of concern. Regardless of the source of lead, the NDDoH has several systems in place to monitor, test, and remediate lead problems.

Lead is a common metal found in the environment that can pose a significant risk to health if too much of it enters the body. Lead can cause damage to the brain, red blood cells and kidneys. The greatest threat is to young children and pregnant women because it can slow mental and physical development.

Lead seldom occurs naturally in drinking water supplies. Lead primarily enters drinking water from the corrosion of lead-containing materials in the water distribution system and household plumbing. In Flint's case, the city switched its water source from Detroit's water system to the Flint River in 2014. The river water was not treated properly and lead from older city water pipes leached into the water supplied to Flint homes.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published the Lead and Copper Rule in 1991, and the NDDoH administers this rule in the state. Under the rule, most public water systems must collect samples from a targeted sampling pool of those sites with the greatest risk of lead leaching. The rule requires that water systems provide the homeowner with the information about the lead levels in the water coming out of the taps whenever a sample is collected. If the water exceeds EPA's action level (0.015 milligrams of lead per liter of water) in more than 10 percent of the sites sampled, the system must provide public education, source water treatment and corrosion control.

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In North Dakota, 406 public water systems collected about 4,700 water samples to test for lead during the latest three-year compliance period of 2013 to 2015. Lead concentrations above the action level were detected in about 1 percent of the samples. The systems with those levels have implemented remedial efforts to bring lead concentrations below the action level, which is confirmed by follow-up sampling.

Of greater concern in North Dakota are lead-containing products in and around homes. Lead-based paint is the most common source of lead in the home, even though residential use was banned in 1978. Other potential sources of lead include lead-based stains; certain types of pottery, porcelain and pewter; and antique toys or toys manufactured outside the country.

Children ages 6 and younger are at the most risk for health effects from lead. Approximately half a million U.S. children ages 1 to 5 have blood lead levels above 5 micrograms per deciliter, the reference level at which the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends public health actions be initiated. In North Dakota, about 3,700 children ages 0 to 7 were tested for lead in 2014. About 2.4 percent of these children were found to have blood lead levels above the reference level.

Since 2003, the NDDoH has investigated 102 residences for elevated blood lead levels. Of those investigations, 93 cases were caused by the ingestion of paint chips or dust due to the peeling of lead-based paint or renovating in homes with lead-based paint. The remaining nine cases included sources such as foreign-made toys, antique toys, and old dishes with lead glazing. None of the cases were linked to a municipal water system.

The only way to diagnose lead poisoning is through a blood test. Parents should consult with their doctor if they are concerned about their children being exposed to lead.

For more information on monitoring lead in municipal drinking water, contact Greg Wavra or Amy Kinzler, Division of Municipal Facilities, at 701.328.5211.

For more information about lead or blood testing, contact Terry O'Clair or Sandi Washek, Division of Air Quality, at 701.328.5188; or visit <http://www.ndhealth.gov/AQ/IAQ/LBP/>.

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