

High levels of lead, copper found in water at 19 Detroit schools

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DETROIT, Mich. — There are high levels of lead or copper in the water at 19 Detroit schools. The schools were tested because of the water problems in the nearby city of Flint, Michigan. Not long ago, Flint's water was found to have high levels of lead. Now schools all over the country are testing their water for the metal.

Detroit schools started collecting water samples to test two weeks ago. They tested 62 elementary and middle schools. It found high levels of lead or copper in nearly a third of them but did not say how much there were. The district said it let families know and is working to fix the problems.

Detroit schools shut off all drinking fountains in the affected schools. The schools are giving bottled water to students and people who work in the school. They will do this while more testing is done. If tests show lead in kitchen faucets, schools will make meals that do not need water.

Most Lead Problems Can Be Linked To Old Buildings

School officials across the U.S. are testing drinking fountains and faucets for lead. They want to find problems and help parents feel better. Few schools and child-care centers have to check for lead. Like the Detroit schools, most of them get their water from city-owned water systems. These systems test the water somewhere else, where it hasn't touched any possible lead in the school. High levels of lead can prevent a child's brain from growing properly. It can also cause behavioral problems and can make adults sick.

The Associated Press studied the problem of lead in untested schools. AP is a news agency. It looked at lead levels at schools that run their own water systems. Nearly 280 of these schools had higher lead levels than the national government allows. This was in the past three years alone. About one-third of those had levels that were at least double the limit.

The problems are usually due to old buildings, like the Detroit schools. The buildings have lead pipes, and drinking fountains and faucets with lead parts.

Very Few Schools Required To Check

Flint's problem began in 2014. The state decided to start taking Flint's drinking water from the Flint River to save money. Officials did not treat the water properly.

This let lead from old pipes into homes and businesses. About 8,000 Flint-area children under age 6 may have been exposed to lead. High levels have been found in over 200 children and 100 adults. From Oct. 21 to March 25, about 20,000 people were tested, state officials say.

More tests will be done at the Detroit schools with high lead levels. Over the next two weeks, middle and high schools will also be tested.

Only about 1 out of 10 schools in the country must test for lead, the AP found. About 90,000 get their water from water systems owned by cities or towns. The government does not make these schools test the water.

More Laws, Money To Test Water

This means most children go to school in buildings that might have lead in the water. This is because lead can build up in plumbing over time. On average, school buildings in the U.S. date back to the 1970s. Buildings could be built with lead pipes until 1986. Brass parts could have small amounts of lead until in 2014.

State lawmakers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania recently proposed new laws. They would make all schools test for lead. Some members of Congress have called for putting more money into more lead testing.

It is not known how much fixing the water problems at the Detroit schools will cost. The district does not have a lot of money. State lawmakers recently gave the district \$48.7 million. This money will keep schools open through the end of the year. Governor Rick Snyder also has asked for \$720 million for the district.

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