

HPAE ALERT
Lead in Englewood Hospital Drinking Water

Get Tested

Pregnant while working at Englewood in the last six years? Consider testing your children under six.

Request Your Results

Put Your Results in your personal health records

Englewood Hospital recently alerted staff and patients that lead was detected above the EPA action level of 15 parts per billion during tests of a number of drinking water sources – water fountains and faucets – in the hospital. The hospital has offered to test blood lead levels for all interested staff and patients. HPAE encourages you to take the hospital up on the offer and to ask for a copy of your results. Those results should be shared with your physician and put in your medical record.

Understanding your blood lead level results

There is no “positive” or “negative” result for blood lead so it’s important that you have your actual results. Most of us will have some detectable level of lead in our blood especially for those of us born before 1980. However, over the years the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reduced blood lead level of concern for adults. Today, the CDC National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health puts the level of concern at **5µg/dL** or greater (down from the occupational exposure level of 40µg/dL). This level is comparable to levels of concern for children.

A single blood lead level test does not present a complete picture of either your current lead exposure and/or your cumulative lead exposure over your life- time. The new test cannot determine the actual exposure over the time you may have been drinking lead contaminated water in the hospital. The body eliminates half of lead circulating in the blood in approximately one month. Lead is quickly removed from circulation and stored in organs, primarily bone.

Even if you have a test result below 5µg/dL, no one could say with any certainty that you weren’t exposed to the contaminated water. Only several expensive tests such as bone scans could give you a clean bill of health.

Lead exposure in pregnant women and children

Calcium is often mobilized from the bone during pregnancy to meet the needs of the growing fetus. When dietary or calcium supplements are not sufficient, lead stored in the bone may be mobilized as well. A developing fetus is especially vulnerable

to the lead in his/her mother's blood stream. As well as exposing the fetus to recent lead exposure (from drinking water or other sources), a mother can potentially expose the fetus to lead drawn from the bone into the blood-stream.

The CDC has strict guidelines on blood lead levels for children. Children under six are especially vulnerable to lead exposure. The research has shown significant developmental delay and health problems in children exposed to lead in utero and at an early age. According to CDC, there are no "safe" levels of blood lead for children. The agency has designated 5µg/dL blood lead as a level of concern. Children with results of 5µg/dL should be evaluated by a physician.

If you were pregnant over the last six years and your children born within that period have not been lead tested, consider having them tested by the hospital and sharing their results with their physicians.

Adults with low-lead exposure

Adults with blood lead levels at 10µg/dL or less may experience:

- A higher rate of essential tremor
- Decreased hearing
- Decreased cognitive function
- Increased blood pressure
- Cardiovascular complications
- Reduced fetal growth of exposed women
- Increase in spontaneous abortion

Adults with 5µg/dL or less blood lead level have been shown to have a higher rate of kidney problems (decreased glomerular filtration rate). And maternal blood lead of 5µg/dL has been associated reduced fetal growth

What the local is doing?

The union is entitled to a copy of the collective blood lead results under the OSHA Access to Medical and Monitoring Information standard. We will be requesting a copy of those results to determine the overall impact on our members. . Those results will not have individual names or identifiers.

The union is also seeking more information from the hospital on the methods for testing this time and the results of any prior lead testing over the last ten years. The union is also asking for details of the hospital investigation (i.e. sources of the lead etc.) and plans for remediation such as replacing old brass fixtures and lead contaminated supply lines. Most of all we want verifiable assurances that all patients and staff will not be exposed to lead in drinking water in the future.

We will report back to you on what we have discovered about this incident.

Until then, if you have any questions or concerns, please call Carlton at 201-262-5005 ext. 120 or email clevine@hpae.org.