

# Lead

**The water from our supply works does not contain lead but it can arise in tap water after contact with lead in plumbing systems.**

Lead can be picked up when water is passed through lead pipes or lead soldered joints.

Over the past 30 years or so, copper, iron and polyethylene pipework has been used in most plumbing systems and also for the pipework from the main to the home. Lead was in more common use prior to that time.

Even if your home has no lead pipework it is still worth checking that the pipe running from the boundary of your property to the stoptap inside your home is not lead. You may be able to see the end of the incoming pipe connecting to your internal stoptap.

Lead pipes are usually about 25 mm (1 inch) in diameter and, as characteristic have a rounded swollen joint where they connect to the stoptap or meet other lead pipes. Unpainted pipes are soft and dull grey but show the shiny metal beneath when scraped gently.

**If there is no lead pipework you will see either:**

**Copper** - *hard, bright or dull brown*

**Iron** - *very hard, dark grey or rusty*

**Polyethylene** - *coloured blue, black or grey*

The water main in the road and the “communication” pipe to the boundary of your property is the responsibility of Southern Water. You are responsible for the “supply” pipe under your garden and into your house.

If you have lead pipes do not drink water that has been lying in the pipes overnight. First thing in the morning run the tap for about one minute but try not to waste the water. Instead fill a washing-up bowl and use the water in your garden or for some other purpose. You will need to run the tap for longer if your tap is more than 50m from the main. As a guide 10m of pipe holds 1.2 litres of water. Ensure that the cold kitchen tap is fed directly from the main. Only use this water for drinking or food preparation and not water from the hot or other cold taps.

The permanent solution is to replace all lead pipework. The use of lead solder or lead pipes is now prohibited even for repairs. Lead solder should never be used with copper pipes for drinking water and copper and lead pipes should never be mixed because this causes lead to dissolve more quickly.

If lead pipework is replaced, especially when a non-metallic alternative is used, the electrical earthing for your home should be checked by a qualified electrician because, in the past many homes have been earthed through the incoming supply pipe.

If you are concerned that you may have lead plumbing and wish to arrange for the level of lead in your drinking water to be checked please send an email to [customerservices@southernwater.co.uk](mailto:customerservices@southernwater.co.uk) or phone 0845 278 0845.

Southern Water will carry out the following should lead pipework be found:

- If you choose to replace all the pipework inside and outside your home we will replace any lead on our pipework back to the main free of charge
- If we find any lead pipework during routine maintenance work, this will be replaced wherever possible
- If, when checking for lead in water, analysis shows a concentration greater than the required standard we will replace any lead present in our pipework and advise you regarding your own plumbing
- If we carry out a free leak repair and find lead externally we will replace up to 10m of your pipework free of charge.

Presently the maximum concentration for lead in drinking water is 25 µg/l (micrograms per litre). However, the standard is being progressively reduced and by the end of 2013 the maximum concentration will be 10 µg/l.

Under a previous Undertaking to the Government treatment to prevent lead dissolving in pipework was installed at 23 sites by the end of 1995. Investigations continue to identify where further improvements can be achieved and we have made a commitment to investigate where, to comply with the new standards, treatment could be further optimised or new treatment should be installed.