

Lead explained

Lead in drinking water

In Scotland, lead does not occur naturally in significant concentrations in our water supplies. The problem arises when drinking water comes into contact with lead supply pipes, lead tanks, lead solder joints on copper pipes, or inferior quality brass fittings and taps, particularly for longer periods (e.g. overnight). This can result in high lead levels in the drinking water supply.

Information on the health effects of exposure to lead can be found on the NHS Inform website:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/lead-poisoning>

This factsheet will provide you with information on:

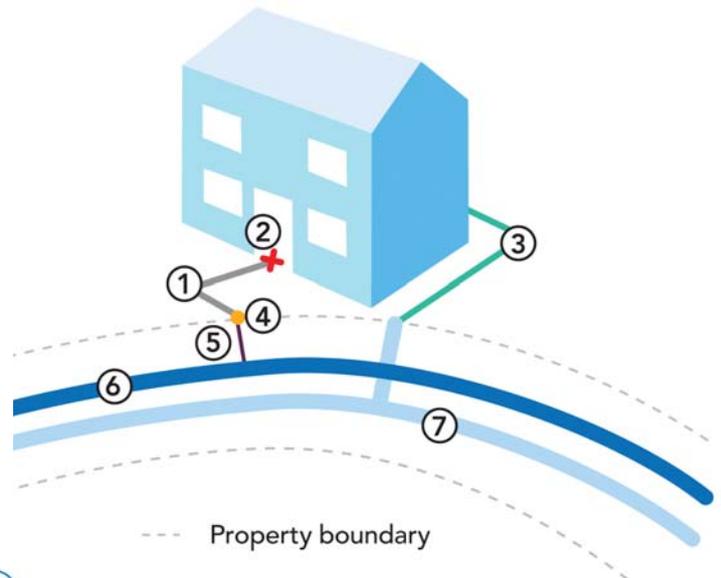
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Where lead comes from

The use of lead service pipes was phased out during the 1960's and officially became illegal in 1969. Modern service pipes are made of blue plastic.

Where we sample

Water is sampled regularly at our treatment works, service reservoirs and at our customers' taps to monitor the quality of the drinking water. In addition to this, some water quality parameters are continuously monitored at major treatment works. Across Scotland laboratory tests are carried out on water samples each year for regulatory purposes. Many more samples are taken by staff for operational reasons (e.g. bursts, new mains, complaints). The percentage of all regulatory samples complying with the relevant standards in Scotland is over 99%.



Water and waste pipes		Water and waste pipes	
①	— The water supply pipe	Homeowner	
②	✘ Stop valve	Homeowner	
③	— Private drain	Homeowner	
④	● Stopcock/meter	Scottish Water	
⑤	— The communication pipe	Scottish Water	
⑥	— The water main	Scottish Water	
⑦	— Sewer	Scottish Water	



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Lead service pipes (supply + communication pipes)

If there is a higher than background level of lead in your drinking water this is likely to be caused by the service pipe to your property. This is the pipe that carries water from the water main in your street direct to your property. The service pipe is made up of two parts – the communication pipe and the supply pipe (please see the diagram on the reverse).

Scottish Water is responsible for the water main in your street and the communication pipe up to, and including, the stopcock, which is normally located at the boundary of your property. The property owner is then responsible for the supply pipe from the stopcock into the property and all of the indoor plumbing.

Lead soldered joints

Lead may also enter your water supply through soldered joints in household copper pipework. Although lead solder for these types of joints was prohibited in 1987, there is evidence that lead solder is still sometimes used illegally. Scottish Water recommends that you always use a licensed plumber. Full contact details are provided at the end of this factsheet.

Lead tanks

Some older properties, including tenements, may still have a lead-lined water storage tank.

Where the drinking water tap in the kitchen is supplied from a household storage tank, Scottish Water advises that the kitchen plumbing is changed to connect this tap direct from the supply pipe. This is particularly important if there is a lead-lined tank, because lead may enter the water from this tank.

For further guidance please contact our **Customer Helpline** on **0800 0778778**, or seek advice from your licensed plumber.

Why lead can be a problem

When water lies in contact with lead service pipes, lead-lined tanks, or lead solder, particularly for longer periods (e.g. overnight) it can absorb lead. The longer time that water lies in contact with lead, the more lead will enter the water.

Exposure to significant quantities of lead can be harmful to health especially for unborn babies and young children. For this reason it is important that lead levels in drinking water are kept down to the lowest levels, particularly for those at special risk.

Lead in drinking water and the law

We must meet a strict standard on the level of lead in drinking water. The maximum limit (PCV – Prescribed Concentration or Value) for lead in drinking water is 10 microgrammes per litre.

How to check if you have lead pipes

If you live in an older property you may still have some lead plumbing present. You may already know if you have a lead service pipe or a lead-lined storage tank within your property.

Even if you have already replaced your internal plumbing, it is important to check if any underground water pipes in your garden or driveway are made of lead.

If you are not sure whether you have any lead pipework please contact our **Customer Helpline** on **0800 0778778** (we may organise a water sample from your property) or alternatively, phone your local council's Environmental Services Department and ask for advice. You will find contact details for your local council in your phone book.

What to do if you have lead pipes

If the analysis of your water sample shows that the lead level is higher than the current PCV, we would advise you to consider replacing your lead pipes as soon as possible. We will replace our communication pipe, if it is found to be lead, when the PCV is exceeded.

Grants

You may be able to obtain a grant for part of this lead replacement work from your local council. For specific information on your local council and up to date details of funds available, please contact your local council's Environmental Health Department.

If you find that you have lead solder fittings and your house is less than 10 years old you should contact the house builder. Alternatively, contact a licensed plumber for further advice and information.

Practical steps to reduce lead in drinking water

If you think you have lead pipe, you should follow these simple steps until you are able to replace them:

- Always take your drinking and cooking water directly from a mains-fed tap. This is normally the cold water tap at the kitchen sink.
- Never use water for drinking or cooking from any hot tap. Warm water increases the amount of lead that is absorbed from plumbing.
- Run the mains tap first thing in the morning to flush out any water that has been lying overnight before using any water for drinking or cooking. You should also do this if the water has not been used all day (e.g. when you're out at work) and always before making up bottle feeds for infants.
- Two minutes is usually enough to flush out this water. However, if your service pipe is longer than average, you'll need to allow a bit longer for the water to flush through.

If you need any more information, please contact our **Customer Helpline** on **0800 0778778**.

Licensed plumbers

We would always recommend the use of licensed plumbers. Scottish Water supports and promotes the WaterSafe scheme. WaterSafe is a dedicated online search facility to help customers to find the nearest qualified plumbing and heating professionals in their area.

Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation (SNIPEF) runs the Plumbing Industry Licensing Scheme and this is part of WaterSafe.

To find a licensed plumber in your area, visit WaterSafe at www.watersafe.org.uk or SNIPEF at www.needaplumber.org.

We want to make it easy to contact us – here's how:

We always have someone here to take your call, you can write to us or alternatively you can contact us through our website.

Alternative formats of this leaflet can be made available free of charge. For information on Braille, large print, audio and a variety of languages, please call our Customer Helpline.

If you have a disability, medical condition or other reason where you may need additional assistance from Scottish Water then please contact us and we can add your name, address and requirements to our confidential Additional Support Register.

We record all calls for quality and training purposes.

-  www.scottishwater.co.uk
-  facebook.com/scottishwater
-  [@scottish_water](https://twitter.com/scottish_water)
-  customer.services@scottishwater.co.uk
-  Scottish Water, PO Box 8855,
Edinburgh, EH10 6YQ
-  Customer Helpline free 24/7
0800 0778778
-  To receive **free** texts (SMS)* to keep up to date about our work or service updates, such as having no water supply, in your area – please text **'Update' with your postcode** to **82228**.

Please quote this reference code when contacting us: **SWFact LE5 05/17**