

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Lead Service Line Replacement

Every Ohioan deserves clean, safe and affordable drinking water.

Yet, we know lead pipes continue to threaten the safety of Ohioans' drinking water despite advances in water treatment technologies. Below you will find information about the problem with lead in our drinking water as well as the health impacts to children and adults. You will also learn about the shortcomings of the new federal lead and copper rule and the policy solutions we recommend to address the public health threat of lead in Ohio.

Lead in our drinking water delivery systems

While most of us know about the lead contamination in the tap water of Flint, Michigan, few people realize lead-contaminated drinking water is a nationwide problem.

There are an estimated 9.3 million lead service lines—lead pipes connecting the water main under the street to the plumbing systems in homes—across the country, and they are the main source of lead in drinking water.

Ohio has a legacy of lead in its drinking water delivery systems. Currently, there are an estimated 650,000 lead service lines throughout Ohio, more than almost any other state in the nation. We must remove these lead service lines to protect Ohioans. Action is long overdue.



There are an estimated **650,000** lead service lines throughout Ohio.



Approximately **3,500 children** in Ohio had elevated levels of lead in their blood in 2019





The Impact of Lead

Lead is one of the most widely studied neurotoxins. EPA, CDC and health experts agree: no amount of lead is safe. Exposure to lead, even at low levels, can cause serious health effects in all age groups. Infants and children exposed to lead may have impaired brain development, including decreases in IQ and attention span and increases in learning and behavioral problems. Exposure during adulthood increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure, as well as kidney and nervous system problems.

Lead exposure during pregnancy is associated with health impacts like preterm delivery and reduced birth weight. Because lead is stored in the bones and can be released during pregnancy, exposure early in life can result in significant harm to future generations. Further, lead disproportionately impacts children in low-income communities as well as Black and other communities of color. Nearly 3,500 children in Ohio had elevated levels of lead in their blood in 2019.

The primary sources of lead exposure among infants and young children are from lead-based paint and lead in water—driven largely by consumption of lead dust and infant formula mixed with contaminated water. For children not living in a home with lead-based paint or lead pipes, lead-contaminated food is a major source. While we need to reduce all sources of lead, there is a clear need and consensus to address lead pipes in our drinking water systems.

A New National Rule Falls Short

In December 2020, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its long awaited revision of the 1991 Lead and Copper Rule (LCR)—the nation’s main rule addressing lead in drinking water. While the final rule makes several improvements, including requiring water systems to inventory lead service lines and provide customers notification of their presence, overall, the rule continues to treat lead service line replacement as a last resort. It places the financial burden of lead service line replacement on homeowners, leaving low-income residents behind. The rule also continues to allow for “partial” replacements—which can significantly increase short-term lead in water levels. It fails to provide the long-term lead exposure reductions provided by full replacement.

Getting The Lead Out: Policy Recommendations

The best way to protect public health is to prevent lead exposure in the first place before it causes damage. In the words of nationally-renowned pediatrician and child advocate Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, “Primary prevention means preventing harm from occurring before a child moves into a house, before a mom gets pregnant. A truly visionary program would be methodically identifying and eliminating the lead from our environment completely before a child is exposed.”

We can no longer afford to wait, as the cost of waiting far outweighs the cost of replacing the lead service lines. In fact, a recent analysis demonstrates that the societal benefits of replacements far outweighs the cost: each full line replaced yields an average \$22,000 payback in reduced deaths from heart disease alone.

Therefore, in addition to ramping up efforts on lead-based paint, our organizations propose a cooperative state program that empowers public water systems to coordinate replacement of all lead service lines. To that end, we recommend the following policies for the state of Ohio:

- Require full lead service line replacement in Ohio within a 20 year timeframe.
- Create an Office of Lead Service Line Replacement within the Ohio EPA
- Take a one-touch approach to removing lead in residential units by creating a program that combines multiple funding streams from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, State Revolving Loan Fund, and other sources to remove all lead from a residential unit, including both paint and the lead service lines.
- Prioritize high risk customers first.
- Enable public water systems to create programs that allow the systems to use rate revenue to undertake full lead service line replacements.
- Direct the Ohio EPA to collaborate with public water systems to identify funding for lead service line replacement programs via grants, prioritizing low-income communities and communities lacking economies of scale to fully replace lead service lines.

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For more information, please visit:

theoec.org/leadservicelinereplacement

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