



News Release

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Detroit Public Schools Begins Screening Water in Schools for Lead and Copper

Precautionary screening of 60 elementary-middle schools already complete

DETROIT, APRIL 5, 2016 – Similar to many school districts around the country, but particularly in Michigan, Detroit Public Schools has begun proactively screening the drinkable water in its school buildings for lead and copper. DPS began the process of screening its schools the week of March 28, 2016 during the District’s Spring Break, using the most recent EPA protocols.

“Like every school district, DPS makes the health and safety of its students and staff its first priority. We are committed to ensuring that each of our schools provides an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning,” said DPS Transition Manager Judge Steven Rhodes. “The District has an obligation to ensure that our students and staff can focus all of their attention on what is most important – improved academic achievement. Proactively screening the water in our schools will help everyone stay focused on this goal.”

DPS is conducting the precautionary screenings in partnership with the City of Detroit, and the Detroit Health Department.

The District has completed the collection of samples from all 60 of its elementary and elementary-middle schools. Middle schools and high schools will be screened over the next two weeks.

As of Monday, April 4, 2016, DPS received test results on nine school buildings. Seven of the nine came back non-detect for lead and copper. Of the two remaining schools,

one of the sample results came back above EPA levels for copper, and the other had elevated lead levels

The screening result for one drinking fountain at Burton International Academy indicated copper above the EPA suggested level of 1300 parts per billion. The former Beard Elementary (which is 100+ years old) had a result that showed lead above the EPA suggested level of 15 parts per billion for one drinking fountain in the main school building.

Beard has not been an active school since 2012 when DPS closed the program. However, the District has leased the main building to a private company since 2014 for administrative space. That company also leases two portable structures on the property, which it uses as Headstart Pre-K classrooms. The water in these portable structures will be sampled on Wednesday, April 6, 2016.

As soon as DPS was made aware of these results, it informed the Detroit Health Department, as well as the leasing party at Beard and the staff and families at Burton, that it would immediately take the following actions:

- Turn off all of the drinking fountain at Burton International until further notice and provide additional bottled water for the school;
- Test all of the drinking fountains at Burton International;
- Turn off the drinking fountains in the main Beard building until further notice and provide bottled water for the staff;
- Analyze the “flush” samples from the water source in question at both Beard and Burton International for further understanding of the issue. A “flush” sample is water taken after 30 seconds of running from the source. The results will be made available next week;
- Turn off the drinking fountains in the two portable structures and provide bottled water to students and staff as a precautionary measure until the results of the screening of the water in the portables are returned.

The District will follow similar contingency protocols if elevated lead or copper levels are revealed in any additional test results. DPS will continue to share the results of the screenings as soon as they are available.

The District contracted with ATC Group, Inc., a licensed environmental consulting firm that has a national presence to collect the water samples, which are being analyzed at an accredited drinking water laboratory.

Samples are being collected from three priority water outlets in each school: a drinking fountain in a school’s teacher lounge, a drinking fountain that has high usage by students and staff (or two if the teacher lounge does not have a drinking fountain), and the food prep sink in the school kitchen. It is important to note that since 2011, DPS’ Office of School Nutrition has provided all schools with 8 oz. bottles of water for students to drink with meals and throughout the day.

It should also be noted that the water at Spain Elementary Middle-School was screened in February 2016 and tested non-detect for lead and bacteria.

About Lead

Although children are exposed to lead from many different sources, the EPA maintains that the main place for exposure is in the home due to lead-based paint that is damaged and peeling. This is especially true in cities that have older housing stock such as Detroit.

As a courtesy to parents, Detroit Public Schools is partnering with the Detroit Health Department, which will make lead screenings for students available at DPS schools should there be test results that indicate lead levels above the EPA protocol. Parent are also encouraged to contact their pediatrician if they have concerns about their childrens' health.

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