

Lead Pipe Replacement Program – Frequently asked questions

What is a water service pipe?

A water service pipe connects a building to the City's municipal water supply. Property owners are responsible for the pipe from their home to the water shut-off valve (referred to as the private portion) and the City owns and maintains the pipe from the water shut-off valve to the watermain (referred to as the public portion).

Who is impacted by lead in drinking water?

Approximately 15% of homes in Ottawa were originally constructed with water service pipes made of lead. Lead pipes were used in home construction up until the 1950s. After that, water service pipes were made of copper. If the original lead water service pipe has not been replaced there is the potential for small amounts of lead to dissolve into household tap water.

Ottawa residents who live in homes built after 1958, as well as commercial and multi-residential properties are at little or no risk of lead exposure through tap water.

Post-1958 homes connected to older watermains

In limited instances, properties built after 1958 may be connected to an older watermain. In this situation, while your private water service pipe (from the water shut-off valve to your home) likely does not contain lead, the City (public) portion of the water service pipe (from the City's watermain to the water shut-off valve) may contain lead.

To ensure your water service pipe is correctly assessed, we recommend that you call 3-1-1 to inquire about the age of the watermain.

How do I know if I have a lead water service pipe?

The best way to determine if your water service pipe is lead or copper is to scratch the service pipe with sandpaper to expose bare metal. The only visible portion of the water service pipe is located between your basement's concrete floor and the water meter. Lead pipes are dull grey in colour and are easily scratched by a hard object. Copper pipes are red-brown and corroded portions may show a green deposit.

Should I be concerned about exposure to lead in drinking water?

Exposure to small amounts of lead is especially harmful for pregnant women and can have harmful effects on a child's development.

Lead can be present in many environmental sources including soil, dust, food, air, and drinking water. Some household products such as jewellery, crystal, and ceramic pottery can also contain lead. Household dust and dirt often represent the greatest lead exposure for young children.

Although the lead contribution from tap water is generally low, it can be significant in some homes with lead water service pipes.

Visit [Health Canada's website](#) for more information on lead and human health, or contact Ottawa Public Health at 613-580-6744 (TTY: 613-580-9656), or by email at healthsante@ottawa.ca.

Who is responsible for replacing water service pipes?

The water service pipe that connects to your home is composed of two portions: a public portion owned by the City from the City's watermain to the water shut-off valve, and a privately-owned portion from the water shut-off valve to your home. When a water main is replaced or upgraded, the City replaces the public portion of the lead service pipe with copper. Unless the homeowner pays to have their portion of the water service pipe replaced, it will remain as lead.

How can I have my tap water tested for lead?

If you're concerned about the potential presence of lead in your tap water, you can [request a water quality test](#).

Will my home water filter remove lead from drinking water?

Most pitcher-style filters will reduce lead levels in your tap water to safe levels; however, it is recommended that the filter unit be certified to the NSF/ANSI 53 standard for the removal of lead. This information can be found on the label. You can [complete an online search](#) for an NSF-approved filter. It is important to change the filter cartridges as per manufacturer's recommendations. The use of a reverse osmosis treatment system will remove lead completely.

The City offers impacted residents a reusable pitcher and approximately a one-year supply of NSF-53 water filters certified to remove lead from your tap water while you await replacement of your lead water service pipe.

To qualify, you must meet one of the following criteria:

- Lead levels in tap water equal to or exceeding 5 ppb following a [water quality test](#) by City staff;
- Participation in [full \(private and public\) replacement of a water service pipe](#) through the Lead Pipe Replacement Program.

What is the typical cost of replacement for a private water service pipe?

The replacement cost for the private portion of a water service pipe will depend on the length and depth of the private lead water service pipe.

What is a *Connect at Post* request and why is proof required for a rebate?

A **Connect at Post** is a request for City staff to attend a property to connect the private water service to the isolation valve. Only City staff have authority to operate the Water Distribution system, including the isolation valve.

Proof of a **Connect at Post** is required as part of the rebate process to discourage the practice of connecting a new water service to a small piece of old service left on the private side of the isolation valve. Please note that it is the contractor/homeowner's responsibility to ensure that [adequate trenching and shoring protection](#) is in place for City crews to complete the connection.

Is preparatory work included as part of the program?

No. The property owner can complete the preparatory work themselves or make separate arrangements with a contractor to complete the work. This work is to be completed prior to the replacement of the water service pipe.

Preparatory work cannot be included as part of the rebate or loan and must be billed separately from the water service replacement work. Preparatory work may include the removal of gardens, landscaping and special finishes, including the removal of items placed by the homeowner or previous homeowner(s) on public property.

How is reinstatement work addressed?

On **private property**, the property owner can complete the reinstatement work themselves or make separate arrangements with a contractor.

The City will reinstate **public property** with topsoil, sod, gravel and asphalt only. The reinstatement of special finishes may not be included.

Reinstatement work cannot be included as part of the rebate or loan and must be billed separately from the water service replacement work.

Should I also replace my sewer pipe?

If it is verified that your private water service pipe is made of lead, City staff may schedule a closed-circuit television video (CCTV) inspection of your sanitary sewer service pipe. The CCTV inspection will identify any deficiencies, such as a blockage or damage, that could interfere with the operation of your sewer lateral pipe, connecting your home to the City's sewer main. In most cases, both sewer and water service pipes

are located in the same area. If repairs are needed, it is typically more economical and less disruptive to replace both services pipes at the same time.

Can I withdraw from the full (private and public) service replacement?

You may withdraw at any time. There is no charge for the initial site visit for water service pipe inspection. If you withdraw after signing an agreement, you will be invoiced for the cost of any work completed on your property, plus the applicable program fees.

I already applied for the full (private and public) service replacement. When will I be contacted for an appointment?

Property owners eligible for replacement will receive a phone call from the City prior to construction season, to provide a date when the water service pipe will be replaced. Scheduling will depend on priority for replacement and the date of application.

I applied for the full (private and public) service replacement last year, but I have not received any follow-up. Should I re-apply for the program?

No. Your application will remain on file and there is no need to reapply. If you have questions regarding your application, please contact the City (<mailto:info-water@ottawa.ca>).

Who do I call if I have questions or concerns about my water quality?

Call 3-1-1 if you require additional information or have questions about keeping your tap water lead-free.