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Lead found in fountains at 6 more Boston schools

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SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2016

By **Matt Rocheleau**

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Elevated lead levels have been found in drinking fountains at six more Boston school buildings, officials announced Tuesday morning, forcing the city to provide bottled water for thousands of additional students when school opens in several weeks.

The water fountains have been shut off at the buildings, which house seven schools in total, school officials said. Among them is Boston Latin School, the city's largest public school, with an enrollment of about 2,400.

In each school, at least one water fountain tested was found to have lead concentrations exceeding 15 parts per billion, which is the state's limit for lead levels in school drinking water. Previous testing at the buildings had measured lead levels below regulatory limits, officials said.

"These new results, indicating higher levels, are likely due to testing conditions in the summer that did not reflect typical fountain usage during the school year," said a copy of a letter Superintendent Tommy Chang sent to the school community Tuesday.

"Nevertheless, out of an abundance of caution . . . we immediately deactivated all water fountains in these seven schools and replaced them with bottled water coolers," the letter continued.



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Boston schools with recent lead concerns

In addition to Boston Latin, the latest affected schools are: Patrick Lyndon K-8; Lee Academy; Josiah Quincy Elementary; F. Lyman Winship Elementary; and Jeremiah E. Burke High and Dearborn STEM Academy, which are located in the same building.

The Boston school system has been working for months to address issues around lead levels in the water after previous testing turned up high concentrations of the harmful substance in some schools.



Officials this past spring shut off water fountains at four other school buildings. And at six more buildings, projects launched last school year to try to restore drinking fountains [failed](#) when tests on some of them showed high lead levels after the work was finished.

At four of those schools, children may have drunk water tainted with lead after the fountains [were mistakenly turned on](#) before water testing was complete. That error prompted the school department to place two facilities employees on [administrative leave](#).

The school district also recently [adopted a new water safety policy](#), which called for water to be tested at least once per year — more than required by law — and to ensure testing is done independently and results are verified and [posted online](#).

School Committee chairman Michael D. O'Neill applauded the school department for following the new water safety policy with its announcement Tuesday.

“The district, once they verified the results, immediately communicated them, took the buildings offline, and put the plan in place to put water coolers in each of the buildings so they can ensure to parents and the faculty and staff that we’re not only following the law, but we’re following the moral imperative that of course this is the right thing to do,” he said by phone.

School officials said bottled water will be used in buildings where fountains have been shut off due to lead concerns. That will take a financial toll on the already cash-strapped district.

Most city schools have used bottled water for drinking for nearly three decades, after testing in the 1980s found high lead levels. Currently, 108 school buildings have their fountains shut off and replaced with bottled water. Only 24 school buildings have drinking fountains turned on.

School officials said they remain committed to their long-term goal to restore drinking fountains for use at all schools citywide by 2025, if not sooner.

Ronak Shah of West Roxbury, who has a son in kindergarten and a daughter in the fourth grade at the Lyndon School, said he wants to see the school department focus less on reacting to the issue and more on how to fix the problem.

“They need to move forward and talk about what are the next steps to getting children access to clean drinking water,” he said. “We have an aging infrastructure and need to make investments. They need to find a way to get those costs addressed and find the dollars to make it work.”

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter @mrochele.

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