



# Why some water samples from Massachusetts schools show very high lead levels

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Alarming high levels of lead were found in a small number of water samples drawn recently from drinking fountains inside Massachusetts schools, but at least some of the fountains had sat unused for years, officials said.

The longer water sits in lead-bearing pipes, the more lead can leach in. Testing of such water can produce unusually high results.

The highest lead level statewide was found in November in water from a bubbler in Room 15 of the Hancock K-5 Elementary School in Brockton — 32,400 parts per billion, or ppb.

That was significantly higher than the worst reading to come out of the water crisis in Flint, Mich. — 22,905 ppb from a home tested there last spring.



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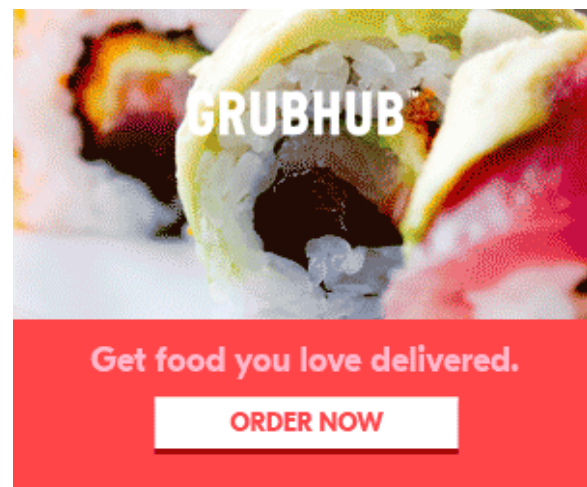
But officials say the Hancock School drinking fountain had not been used for at least five years.

“It hasn’t been used in years, thank God,” said Mike Thomas, deputy superintendent for operations.

Thomas said the fixture is a sink-fountain combo, which has been used for storage in recent years and was filled with teaching supplies.

He said officials tested all fixtures, even ones that had been unused or shut off for years, to get a complete picture of potential problems.

That fountain, and others that tested above the state’s regulatory limit of 15 ppb of lead in school drinking water, were shut off immediately and will be replaced with new hydration stations.



The next-highest reading in the state was a 22,400 ppb sample drawn in early October from a bubbler in Classroom 15 of Leicester Memorial School, an elementary school.

The fountain was rarely, if ever, used recently, said superintendent Judith Jean Paolucci.

“You had to turn the handle really hard [for any water to come out], and it would only dribble out,” she said.

It was immediately shut off and replaced, Paolucci said. A test of the new fountain which replaced it showed lead levels below 1 ppb.

Another very high reading came from a sample collected March 18 from the Hood Elementary School in Lynn, which showed a level of 12,300 ppb.

That reading was collected from a fountain in Classroom 108, according to Michael Donovan, chief of

inspectional services and building commissioner for the city of Lynn.

That fixture was a sink-fountain combo that had not been used in recent years and was filled with books, he said.

A sample drawn in February from a fountain in Room 208 of the Hood school also produced a high result: 2,760 ppb of lead. That fountain had been shut off for years prior to testing, according to Donovan.

He said that any fixture in the district that produced a high result has been shut off. Some will be replaced; others are not needed and may remain off permanently.

At the Sgt. William Carney Memorial Academy Elementary School in New Bedford, a sample drawn in November from a bubbler in Room 203 came back at 8,300 ppb.

Andrew O’Leary, business manager for the school district, said he did not recall that reading but in general elevated lead level readings in that building, and across much of the district, came from bubblers and other water sources that were rarely, if ever used, allowing for lead to leach into the water as it sat in the fixtures.

He said all taps where elevated levels were found were immediately shut off and are being replaced.

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