Welcome to part 2 in the online training series about drinking water safety in schools.

EPA’s guidance for reducing lead in drinking water, called the 3Ts provides tools for schools, child care facilities, states, and water systems to implement voluntary lead in drinking water testing programs.

3Ts stands for training, testing, and taking action.

EPA has developed a toolkit to help put each of the 3Ts into action.

We will walk through some of the steps highlighted in the toolkit.

A critical first step in developing a water testing program is for schools to develop a communication plan so that staff, parents and the community are aware of the schools’ 3Ts program, what actions will be occurring, and when information will be shared. This helps to build trust with the community and ensure an open and transparent process.

This includes forming a communication team. The team can include individuals within the school community as well as the professionals and leaders in the larger community.

The EPA 3Ts toolkit outlines detailed guidance on who should be a part of the communication team, how to assign specific roles to team members, how to establish a contact list, how to identify key audiences, and different communication mechanisms to consider.

The EPA recommends communicating with the school community as well as the larger community, before the lead testing program begins, as soon as results are available, and in response to inquiries about the program.

Before conducting any water testing, schools should conduct a walkthrough of the facility to identify all of the faucets and fixtures used for drinking water and cooking, learn where water enters the facility, if faucets have filters or aerators, and if there are any of the fixtures on EPA’s list of lead coolers that should be immediately removed. This assessment allows schools to

Understand how water enters and flows through the building or buildings

Identify and prioritize locations for sites for sampling; and

Identify additional sites staff or students may be using for drinking water, such as bathroom faucets, locker room showerheads and non-traditional drinking water outlets that might be used to fill water containers

When prioritizing sampling sites, remember that results from one outlet should not be used to represent water quality of the entire facility since lead can be present anywhere in the building’s plumbing. It is important to think about all of the water outlets that are used for human consumption including drinking fountains, nurses’ office sinks, classrooms, kitchen sinks, and teachers’ lounges. Having a correct sampling plan is the key to getting useful results.

Once priority sample sites have been identified, work with a certified water analysis lab to test the tap water. The lab may come draw the samples or may provide step by step instructions for how to collect the samples and send them to the lab for analysis. School districts may have a preferred lab to work with so check with the district facilities office.

If the testing results indicate elevated lead levels, then immediately stop using the affected water outlets. Next, notify school staff, parents, and students of test results and actions being taken to remediate the problem. Use bottled water as a temporary solution as needed.

Possible solutions can include using a flushing protocol to regularly flush water pipes to eliminate stagnant water, filtering the water, or replacing lead pipes, fixtures and faucets.

When the problem has been fixed be sure to communicate that to students, staff and families so that they know that the water is safe to drink.

It is important to share the test results whether they are good or bad, and explain what the results mean. This reinforces having a transparent process.

If elevated levels of lead or other contaminants are found, then let people know what will be done to fix the problem.

If the results are good, share the good news and show families you take their children’s health seriously and promote the quality of the water at school.

Please continue to Module 2, part 3