

Dear PPS Families and Staff,

As we head back into the school year next week, we want to provide updated guidance to the community about eating produce from school gardens and other water uses.

Gardens

Last week Portland Public Schools issued guidance encouraging the community not to eat produce from school gardens. The guidance was based on the fact that many of our gardens have been irrigated with water testing above federal drinking water standards.

Here's a joint statement from PPS and the Oregon Healthy Authority (OHA):

Eating fresh produce from a garden is a healthy choice for people of all ages and their families. Recently, OHA looked at scientific research about the safety of gardening in soil that could contain lead. The amount of lead delivered to soil through water is quite small compared to the amount of lead already present at background levels in soil. Other potential sources, such as lead-based paint chips and dust, represent a much more significant contributor to soil lead concentrations. In general, garden plants do not absorb significant quantities of lead. However, it is important for people to wash vegetables and hands after gardening to reduce possible exposure to lead in soil, which is the major potential source of lead contamination on produce.

We appreciate the guidance from OHA. As previously communicated, at this point we will not be serving food from school gardens because we are still evaluating fixtures for lead used for food preparation. PPS will reinstitute the use of school garden produce in its kitchens and classrooms once its cold water fixtures are available to safely wash garden fruits and vegetables. We will provide thorough training to our nutrition services staff about proper washing at that time.

Other Water Uses

We've also received confirmation that a myriad of other water uses are safe including hand washing, dish washing, showering, etc. Very little lead is absorbed through the skin from water containing lead, consequently these activities are safe even when elevated in level. However, to be clear, water containing lead over 15 parts per billion cannot be used for drinking, or for food preparation. Food preparation includes washing any food product, be it in a school kitchen or any other school water fixture such as classroom sink. This includes food products brought from home.

Additionally, we know our Intensive Skills Classrooms (ISC) serve students with significant disabilities that often require medical procedures and special feeding protocols as part of their daily educational programming. It is common for students to need food mixed in a blender and fed through a tube. In these instances, standard washing and drying are adequate.

Thank you,
PPS Communications

Courtney Westling
Interim Chief, Community Involvement & Public Affairs
Director of Government Relations
Portland Public Schools
O: [503-916-3342](tel:503-916-3342)
C: [971-334-5314](tel:971-334-5314)