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Lead found in Beaverton school water fountains

Water from two drinking fountains at Highland Park Middle School in Beaverton were tested and shown to have elevated levels of lead, the school district announced Monday. **744-7**

Highland Park's drinking fountains have been shut off and bottled water has been provided, the district said in a news release. The school, at 7000 S.W. Wilson Ave., has about 900 students.

A certified industrial hygienist tested the water after a student raised concerns about the color of water coming out of a fountain,

the district said. Tests also showed elevated levels of iron and cloudiness in "several" drinking fountains, the district said in a news release.

One of the fountains had 21.2 parts per billion of lead and the other had 16.9 parts per billion. The Environmental Protection Agency considers anything over 15 parts per billion to be "actionable," district spokeswoman Maureen Wheeler said.

Wheeler said the water was tested again Monday and results would be known later this week.

Parents have been advised to bring their children to their primary care provider if they're concerned about health effects but no school-

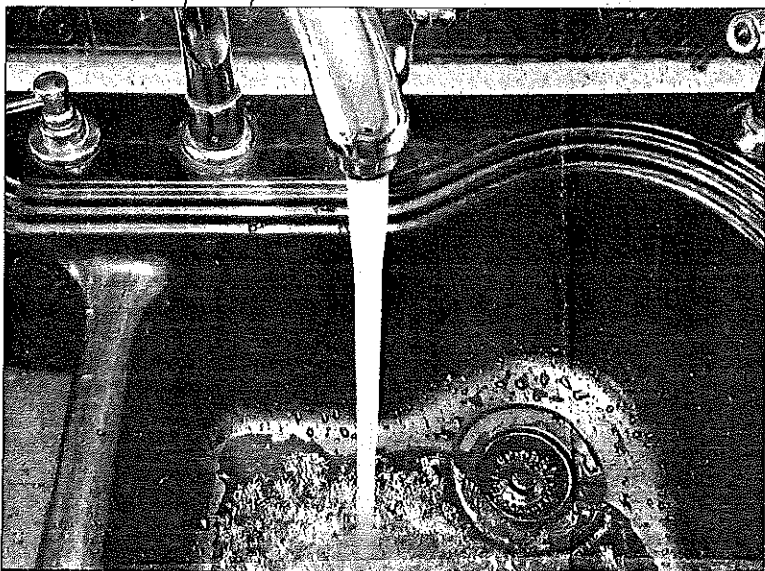
wide screening of students is planned, Wheeler said.

— Allan Brettman

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THOMAS PHOTO: MILES VANCE

Drinking water in the city of Beaverton is safe — It was rated to have achieved "outstanding performance" this year — the city announced Monday following the discovery of heightened levels of lead in water at Highland Park Middle School.

Beaverton water safe, city officials declare Monday

The announcement follows discovery of lead at Highland Park

The Times

The city of Beaverton shared with its residents on Monday that the city's drinking water supply is safe and meets or exceeds state and federal standards.

City officials emailed information about its water supply following an announcement from the Beaverton School District that two water fountains at Highland Park Middle School showed elevated levels of lead related to the age of the pipes in the building.

BSD officials announced Monday that a certified industrial hygienist recently tested Highland Park Middle School's water for lead, metals and bacteria at five different locations in the school.

The district received preliminary results last week that indicated two of the four drinking fountains tested revealed elevated levels of lead.

There were also elevated levels of iron and turbidity (color and clarity) in several of the locations sampled. Water used in the kitchen for food preparation did not have elevated levels.

Regarding Beaverton's city water supply, the city shared the following:

■ The city's water supply meets or exceeds state and federal standards. Information is available in the city's 2016 City of Beaverton Water Quality Report, also known as the Consumer Confidence Report, at BeavertonOregon.gov/CCR.

■ Highland Park water is rated "outstanding performance" by Oregon Health Authority. Beaverton's drinking water system was surveyed/audited by the Oregon Health Authority's Drinking Water Program in April 2016. The OHA found the city's water system facilities "to be well operated and maintained by knowledgeable and competent staff."

■ Highland Park Middle School will receive new pipes throughout the school as part of the current school bond program, which will be completed in summer 2017. Highland Park has 50-year-old galvanized steel

pipes and the water has been discolored due to rust.

■ City officials will monitor the neighborhood water supply. The City Water Operations group plans to take add enhanced precautionary measures such as heightened water monitoring and other actions, including flushing, for the Highland neighborhood. City staff are also coordinating closely with the Beaverton School District.

■ Testing shows Beaverton's water supply well below federal concern levels for lead. The city's latest water quality report shows a lead level of seven parts per billion (ppb) in pipes in designated homes in Beaverton, well below the 15 ppb US EPA action level for drinking water.

■ While lead and copper samples were not collected in 2015 — as per Oregon Health Authority drinking water rules specific to Beaverton — the seven ppb value shown in 2013 is in the 90th percentile result of samples collected that year. The next round of samples will be collected in the summer of 2016 and will be analyzed by the state-certified laboratory.

HIGHLAND PARK'S WATER HAS ELEVATED LEVELS OF LEAD

Bottled drinking water available until pipes replaced in 2017

By ERIC APALATEGUI
The Times

Highland Park Middle School students are drinking bottled water after elevated levels of lead were recently found in two drinking fountains.

School officials took the precaution after preliminary results from water tests came back showing elevated levels of lead last week, according to Beaverton School District spokeswoman Maureen Wheeler.

The tests were performed after a student raised concerns about the color of water coming from a drinking fountain.

Water from two of four drinking fountains that were tested by a certified industrial hygienist revealed the elevated levels of lead, and also elevated levels of iron and turbidity (color and clarity) in some of the sampled locations.

The water used in the school kitchen for food preparation did not have elevated levels.

"We take the health and safety of our students, staff and community seriously and will address the results," Wheeler said in a statement.

The problem originates in the building's 50-year-old pipes, not in the overall water system, which meets or exceeds state and federal standards for drinking water, including for lead content.

Consuming water contaminated with too much lead can result in a variety of health issues including learning and behavioral problems; exposure is particularly harmful to babies and younger children, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Water tests at Highland were performed again on Monday. Results from the re-testing, which is a standard protocol, should be available later this week, Wheeler added.

The school already was scheduled to be completely re-piped in the summer of 2017, a \$15 million project funded through the capital improvement bond voters approved in 2014. Wheeler said there is not enough time for design, permitting and construction — which involves tearing into floors and walls — to move the re-piping work up to this summer.

In the meantime, district officials are following the industrial hygienist's recommendations, which includes turning off drinking fountains in hallways and classrooms. Signs will be posted in classrooms that have combined faucet and drinking fountain fixtures.

The school will provide bottled water dispensers in every classroom as well as in the gyms, main office, staff room, cafeteria and health room. Many students already bring bottled water and are encouraged to continue the practice, Wheeler said.

BSD maintenance staff will inspect the building's water system and replace parts as needed. District officials also will consult with the city.

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Lead

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Late Friday, the district sent another statement, announcing it would turn off all its drinking fountains and bring in bottled water for drinking and food preparation for the remainder of the school year. Once testing happens this summer, the statement said, officials will turn off and keep off any water fixture that don't meet lead safety standards.

"We are taking these steps out of an abundance of caution for our students, our teachers and our staff, as we work to determine whether additional schools have elevated levels of lead in the drinking water," Smith said in the statement.

Parents at the affected schools had said they worried students at other Portland schools could also be drinking tainted water. The last time Portland Public Schools did widespread water quality testing, 15 years ago, the results showed "most schools have at least one location where lead levels are above 15 ppb," then-Superintendent Jim Scherzinger wrote to parents.

"There is ample reason to assume that retesting all schools in the district will yield a similar outcome to that found at Rose City and Creston," said parent Emily Patterson, whose son attends third grade at Rose City Park.

Martha Ruttle, whose daughter attended first and second grade in one of the Rose City Park classrooms served by a tainted water fountain, broke down in tears, thinking she sent her child into that setting day after day.

"I feel very betrayed," she said.

First test since 2001

No one knows how long the faucets and fountains at Rose City Park and Creston have been emitting lead, because they have not been tested since 2001. More than 550 students attend classes in Rose City Park School in Northeast Portland, and 400 go to Creston in Southeast Portland. In its statement late Friday, the district said it would provide on-site blood screening at the two campuses starting the week of June 6.

Portland Public Schools arranged to test the water at Rose City Park after a parent, concerned by what happened in Flint, Michigan, insisted on it. It's unclear why the district ran tests at Creston. Miles, the district spokeswoman, said, "We do random testing when requested by school staff or concerned parents."


Those tests detected high levels of lead coming from

Parent requests

A small group of Rose City Park parents, representing Access Academy and Beverly Cleary families, said they expect the district to do the following:

- Provide bottled water at all schools until tests prove all water sources are safe.
- Show a work plan with a timeline, budget and staff to test every school before the 2016-17 year starts in August.
- Install lead-certified filters in every sink and drinking fountain that tests positive for any level of lead after mitigation, not only those at 15 parts per billion.
- Communicate the lead test results for every sink and fountain at each school, and any mitigation plans if needed, in a clear, family-friendly manner.
- Tell families with children who have been at any contaminated Portland school since 2001 how they can test their child for lead exposure.
- Show how the district will conduct regular, recurring testing in future years.

— Betsy Hammond

 Find links to the lab reports from Rose City Park and Creston schools in the online version of this story at oregonlive.com/education.

sinks at both schools and from two drinking fountains at Rose City Park and one at Creston.

Nothing in state or federal law requires schools to test drinking water for lead or recommends how frequently faucets and fountains should be retested after being found safe. But many Portland parents are adamant that it should happen more frequently than every 15 years.

Questionable filters

Outrage also surfaced among Portland Public Schools parents in 2001, when the district last conducted thorough water testing.

Of the first 40 schools tested that year, 35 had unsafe levels of lead in the drinking water. So district officials shut off every drinking fountain and some sinks and hauled in five-gallon jugs of clean water for students to drink instead. The last documented testing before then had taken place in 1991.

Parents were livid: How

could the district not have records of systematic testing since a decade earlier?

Then-facilities director Pam Brown had no good explanation but vowed the district would do better: testing more frequently, keeping good records, and making sure parents and the public could see results. And for one year, it did. The district tested every fountain and faucet and made upgrades and repairs at each one that gave lead-laced results.

Some sinks and fountains still gave off lead, however, presumably from pipes deep inside school walls or underground. In those cases, the district installed filters and retested for lead. About 1 percent of the filter-equipped faucets and fountains still emitted too much lead. But it turned out that the filter was faulty in each of those cases, and a new filter took care of the problem, Andy Fridley, Portland's current senior manager for health and safety, wrote in a memo to the Rose City Park school administrators this week.

When all the filters were replaced in summer 2002, Fridley wrote, about 10 percent of the fixtures were tested for lead, and every test came back negative.

Since then, the district has done no systematic testing of water quality, "assuming" that the filters were 100 percent effective, Fridley wrote. But the filters the district uses, Pentair Pentek model CFB-PB10, are not certified as effective for lead reduction.

It is unclear how often the district monitored and replaced the water filters it was counting on to keep students and employees safe. Miles said the district had already budgeted and planned to test all fountains and faucets this summer before news of the tainted water reached parents this week.

Fridley agreed to be interviewed about water quality

monitoring Friday morning but later said he had been asked to delay the interview until after 4 p.m. As of 6 p.m., Fridley was still unresponsive.

About the schools

Rose City Park school, built in 1912 and added on to in 1977, is home to Access Academy, a magnet program for gifted students, and first- and third-grade classes from the overcrowded Beverly Cleary School.

In March, several sinks in two science classrooms and three other rooms were found to be giving lead-tainted water. So were two drinking fountains, one on the first floor and one on the second. Students were allowed to use those fountains and sinks until they were repaired, which took almost two weeks. Follow-up tests on May 6 showed they were safe. Repairs to the science room sinks didn't stop lead emissions, so no one is allowed to drink from them, officials indicated.

Creston, built in 1949, is a K-8 school. In March, a kitchen sink, classroom sink and drinking fountain all were found to be emitting high levels of lead in the water. Water from the fountain was found to contain 33 parts per billion of lead.

Tests run in April also showed high lead levels in a kitchen sink, a classroom sink and library faucet. It is unclear how and whether those problems have been addressed.

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Information on lead-tainted school water filters slowly

By Betsy Hammond
The Oregonian/OregonLive

Portland Public Schools plans to test the water at every school building this summer after tests at Rose City Park and Creston schools found unsafe levels of lead flowing from sinks and drinking fountains.

Parents at Rose City Park say they are extremely upset that school district officials waited until this week to tell them tests conducted eight weeks earlier revealed lead levels as much as double the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "action level" of 15 parts per billion.

And parents across the city turned apoplectic Friday when Superintendent Carole Smith confessed in an email to families and employees that once tests showed the toxic threat, the district kept the water flowing and gave no warnings against its use for nearly two weeks while repairs were completed.

That contradicted the district's earlier representations. Spokeswoman Christine Miles told The Oregonian/OregonLive on Thursday that students were denied access to the tainted water "immediately" once results were known.

"Portland Public Schools regrets not having notified families and staff as soon as the tests indicated that there were elevated levels of lead," Smith wrote.

See Lead, A7