



Lead Service Pipe Replacement Frequently Asked Questions

How does lead enter the drinking water?

Water remains virtually lead-free as it leaves the treatment plant and moves through our water mains in the street. Our distribution system is not a source of lead in water, however, there remain lead service pipes that connect individual homes to the city water supply. Other sources of lead include galvanized iron pipes, lead solder, and brass faucets or fixtures inside homes.

Are there lead sources for drinking water in every DC home?

Lead sources and lead levels in water vary between buildings, so it is important to identify and remove all lead sources for each property. Some service pipes that connect the lead-free water main in the street to household plumbing contain lead. In addition, some plumbing fixtures and joint solder inside homes can contain lead.

How do I identify lead sources?

First, determine if you have a lead service pipe or household plumbing features that contain lead. Call DC Water at (202) 354-3600 to review service pipe records for your property or visit dcwater.com/servicemap. Customers can physically inspect the service pipe at the entrance point, often located on the lowest level or in a basement. Lead pipe is a grey color and can be easily scratched with a coin. A licensed plumber can also evaluate your service pipe, household plumbing and fixtures for lead or lead-containing materials. Alternatively, there is a guide available at dcwater.com.

How do I know if lead is present in my water?

DC Water offers free lead test kits by request at (202) 612-3440 or dcwater.com/lead-testing. It is also important to evaluate pipe and interior plumbing materials. Sometimes, a test may not identify all possible sources.

Why replace my lead service pipe?

If you have a lead service pipe, you are at risk of lead exposure. Lead can be released when water comes in contact with pipes that contain lead. If present, elevated lead levels can cause serious health problems, especially for pregnant women and young children. Lead service pipes are replaced with copper pipes.

Who owns the lead service pipe?

A service pipe connects the water main in the street to your household plumbing and is owned in its entirety by the property owner. However, DC Water is responsible for maintaining the portion in public space—the portion of pipe from the water main in the street to the property line.

How do I replace my lead service pipe?

DC Water will replace the public portion of your lead service pipe at no cost to you, if the homeowner pays for replacement on private property. You may use DC Water's contractors or your own professionals for work on private property. DC Water will coordinate and replace the portion in public space at the same time.

What construction work is required?

Crews will shut the water off to your home for approximately 4-6 hours. Crews will excavate holes approximately 4 ft. by 6 ft. in the street, in the tree space (area between the sidewalk and the curb), and in the yard at the property line. Most work is completed within one day.

How much will it cost?

The cost of lead service pipe replacement on private property varies from home to home and is negotiated between the property owner and the contractor.

On average, replacement costs \$720 to bore a hole for the new pipe through the basement wall, and \$120 per foot from the house wall to the property line. The property line of many homes in the District is at the house front wall, in which case the cost will only be for boring the hole and bringing the new pipe inside the home.

What are my payment options for private lead service pipe replacement?

You may pay for your service pipe in full or with four payment installations, though DC Water does not dictate the terms with the private-side contractors. There is legislation being considered by the DC Council this fall that will provide financial assistance for all residents to replace lead service pipes. The funding will come from the District government and will be based on a household's annual income.

How long until my service pipe is replaced?

Replacement may occur up to a year after signing up for the program. For the most part, replacement occurs during spring, summer, and fall. If your street will be the site of a capital improvement project—like a water main replacement or rehabilitation—in the next two years, service pipe replacement will occur in conjunction with that project.

Will there be digging in my yard?

If you have signed the agreement for DC Water contractors to replace the pipe on the private side, the contractor will minimize digging with a trenchless technology wherever possible that pulls the pipe between the few holes.

Will the fence, retaining wall, porch or hedges be disturbed during construction? What about trees?

In most cases, these items will not be affected. However, if an older retaining wall near the work area is disturbed, the contractor will repair any damage. DC Water contractors take photographs of the repair area prior to replacement to restore the area properly.

To avoid tree and root damage, contractors will use a special tool to minimize the impact of the replacement. In special circumstances, DC Water will work with the DDOT tree expert/arborist to develop a plan and work around major roots.

When will the roadway, sidewalk, and my yard be restored?

DC Water contractors will restore areas behind the curb within two weeks after pipe replacement (assuming no delays due to weather). For roadway repairs, the contractor will repair excavations made in the street within 60 days. For street repaving, some streets may require more than 60 days, if additional work is scheduled and is dependent on weather conditions. If the block is listed on DDOT's repaving schedule, it may require up to one year before the street is repaved.

Will DC Water's contractors replace grass with sod or seed?

Contractors restore lawns and tree boxes with grass seed.

How will DC Water ensure historic brick sidewalks are properly restored?

DC Water requires that, when necessary, the contractor temporarily remove all brick and store it for reuse. When the same bricks are replaced after construction, the color may slightly vary. Occasionally, new brick may be used and will not match exactly.

How does DC Water handle traffic during construction?

DC Water works closely with DDOT to prevent street closure and traffic disruptions during construction. In special circumstances, DDOT may require that the street be temporarily closed and appropriate signage will be posted to detour traffic. In most cases, there will be restrictions on parking spaces.

What happens after lead service pipe replacement?

After performing a lead service pipe replacement, DC Water protects public health by providing a 6-month supply of water filters, recommending a household flushing schedule, and by providing a free lead test kit 4-6 months after the new pipe is installed. These safeguards surpass any federal requirements for lead service pipe replacements.

How do I remove other lead sources?

Replace old galvanized iron plumbing. In households that have or previously had a lead service pipe, lead can accumulate on the inside of some iron pipes. Install lead-free plumbing fixtures, including faucets, valves and fittings. If replacing service pipes or household plumbing is not a practical option, customers are encouraged to use a water filter certified for lead removal.

I believe I have sources of lead in my home. What should I do until they are removed?

Filter tap water for drinking and cooking until all sources of lead are removed. This is especially important for pregnant or nursing women and children under age six. Select a filter certified to remove lead. The filter must meet National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) Standard 53 for lead removal. Flush the cold water tap when water is not used for several hours before using it for drinking or cooking. Run the tap until you notice a temperature change, then run for an additional two minutes. Lead and other metals can dissolve in water when it sits in pipes for a few hours. Regularly remove and clean faucet aerators every three months, because sediment and lead particles can collect in the screen.

Who else is responsible for addressing lead in water in the District of Columbia?**[DC Water](#)**

- Complies with the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Lead and Copper Rule.
- Conducts regulatory and voluntary lead testing and reports results to EPA Region III.
- Conducts public outreach and education.
- Participates in national research studies.

[US Army Corps of Engineers Washington Aqueduct](#)

- Operates two drinking water treatment plants.
- Applies corrosion control treatment to minimize pipe corrosion in the distribution system and customer households.
- Monitors lead levels as water leaves the treatment plant and reports results to EPA Region III.

Public

- Responsible for water service pipes and household plumbing.
- Responsible for ensuring household water quality and minimizing lead exposure, including testing water for lead, flushing household plumbing, and if necessary, using a water filter.

Department of Energy and the Environment (DOEE)

- Enforces the District's lead laws to keep housing and child-care facilities safe.
- Works with families of children whose blood tests show elevated levels of lead.

District Department of General Services

- Provides water lead testing and monitoring in District public schools.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region III, Philadelphia, PA

- Enforces compliance with the Lead and Copper Rule in the District of Columbia.
- Provides technical assistance to Washington Aqueduct and DC Water.
- Reviews treatment processes, monitoring plans and test results to verify compliance with the Lead and Copper Rule.
- Issues violations for noncompliance and requires corrective actions to achieve compliance.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program develops and policies and strategies to prevent lead poisoning
- Educates the public and health care providers about childhood lead poisoning.
- Provides funding to state and local health departments.
- Supports research to measure effectiveness of prevention efforts at federal, state and local levels.

Website links:

- Page describing both ways to replace lead service pipes
<https://dcwater.com/lead-pipe-replacement>
- Page outlining replacement during capital improvement projects
<https://dcwater.com/construction-project-replacements>
- Page outlining voluntary replacement
<https://dcwater.com/voluntary-replacements>
- Page about minimizing lead risk
<https://www.dewater.com/reducelead>