

# Lead in drinking water: simple safety advice for you and your family

You probably never think about it, but every time you turn the tap, the water flows from an underground supply pipe - a crucial bit of pipework beneath your garden or driveway which brings drinking water into your property.

If your home was built before 1970, there's a chance that this supply pipe, and possibly your internal plumbing, is made from lead.

Traces of lead in your water can be harmful, especially to pregnant mums and infants under six. It is advisable to take sensible precautions to minimise exposure to lead.

This leaflet explains what you can do to reduce the risks for you and your family.

## The story of lead: in 60 seconds!

Lead used to be found in everything from petrol and paint to plumbing, but times have changed. As health experts became more aware of the consequences of exposure to lead, governments around the world began to act.

The installation of lead pipes in UK properties stopped in the 1970s. However, it's not uncommon in pre-1970 homes for the household plumbing, including the outside supply pipe, to still be made from lead.

At United Utilities, we've made great strides in the way we treat our water in order to minimise the amount of lead it picks up.

However, where lead pipes are present at home, there can be a health risk – so it's sensible to find out how you can protect yourself and your family.

## Does your home have lead pipes?

If your home was built before 1970, you could have lead pipes.

Your supply pipe (the underground pipe which brings water into your home) could be made from lead. You may also have some lead internal plumbing.

Lead is a dull grey metal, and when scratched, reveals a shiny surface beneath. You can find guidance on some of the tell-tale signs of lead pipes at [unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes](https://unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes), along with information about the risks of lead in drinking water and how to minimise your exposure.

If you are still not sure if you have lead pipes, ask your plumber.



Common household pipes. The lead pipe is easily distinguished by its dull grey colour.

### For further information



[unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes](https://unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes)



**0345 672 3723**

8am - 8pm Mon to Fri

If you have hearing or speech difficulties and use a textphone please dial **18001** followed by the number you require.

## What to do if you find lead pipes

So, you've discovered that your water supply pipe (and possibly your internal pipes) are most likely made of lead. What should you do next?

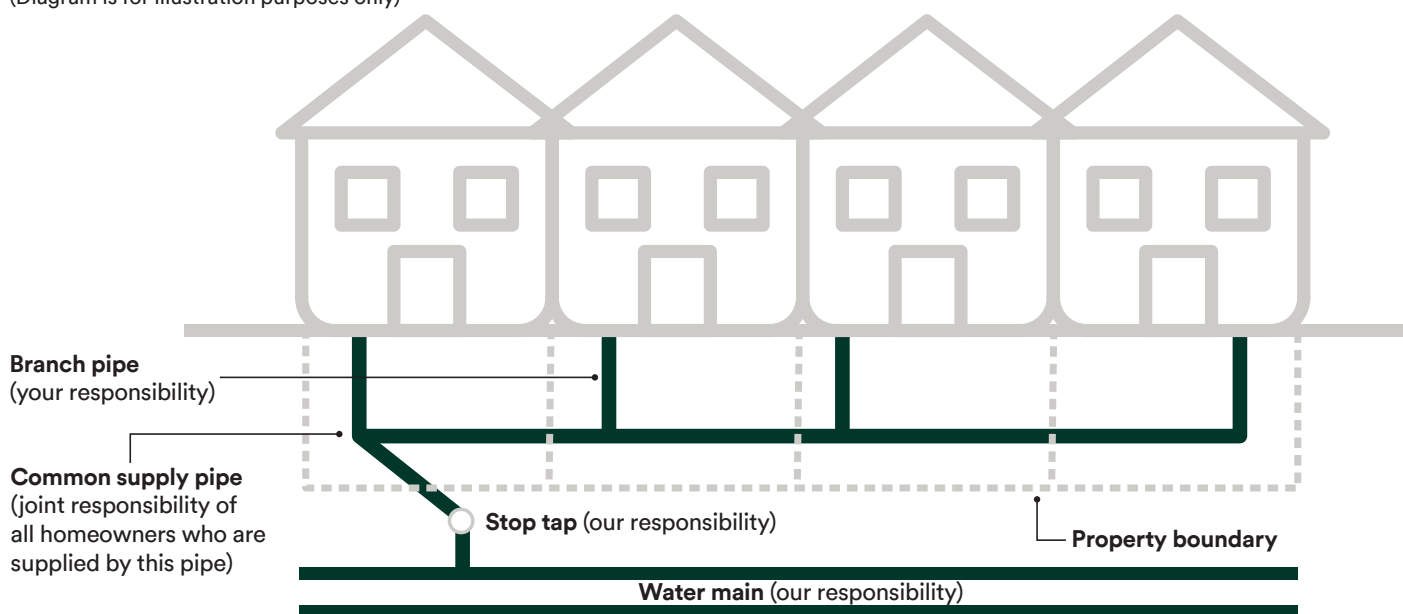
Here are some sensible precautions:

- If the tap has not been used for a few hours (e.g. overnight) let it run to flush out water that has been standing in the pipes. Usually, you'll only need to fill a washing up bowl. Don't forget to use the water for your plants!
- Flushing the loo first thing in the morning also does the job of removing water that has been standing in pipes overnight.
- Only use water from the cold tap in the kitchen for drinking, cooking and making baby formula. Water from the hot water tap is likely to contain higher levels of lead and other metals. It's also worth being aware that boiling water will not remove lead.
- Avoid disturbing or knocking lead pipes.
- When installing or repairing internal plumbing, always use lead free solder.
- If you would rather make up your baby's formula using bottled water, ensure it contains less than 200mg per litre of sodium (Na). Check the bottle label for details.
- If your service pipe is longer than 30 metres, it could be difficult to flush out by running the tap. In these circumstances, you could give serious consideration to getting the lead pipe replaced (see next section).

More information can be found at our website:  
[unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes](https://unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes)

## Supply pipes: where your responsibility lies

(Diagram is for illustration purposes only)



**Please note:** your property boundary marks the point at which you become responsible for single water supply pipes.

## Replacing your lead service pipe

The surest way to avoid the health issues associated with lead pipes is to get them replaced by a plumber.

You can find your nearest quality assured plumber at [watersafe.org.uk](https://watersafe.org.uk)

If you need to replace your lead service pipe, we'll connect the new one to our network, free of charge, and replace any remaining lead on our side of the street.

If you live in a terraced property, you may share a lead supply pipe with your neighbours. In these circumstances, you can team up with your neighbours to get the shared pipe replaced, or you can branch out on your own by laying a new plastic service pipe, unique to your property.

The diagram at the bottom of this page shows where your responsibility lies.

For more advice about replacing your lead service pipe, call our specialists on **0345 072 6082** or go to [unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes](https://unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes)

### Any questions?

If you have any questions about lead pipes and your drinking water, please call us on **0345 672 3723**, or visit [unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes](https://unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes), where you will find lots more information.

### About us

United Utilities is the North West's water company. We keep the taps flowing and toilets flushing for seven million customers every day. From Crewe to Carlisle, we work hard behind the scenes to help your life flow smoothly.