

## **St. Joseph, Louisiana Water Safety Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the current situation with the water in St. Joseph?**

Gov. John Bel Edwards issued a Public Health Emergency for the Town of St. Joseph in North Louisiana. Residents are advised to use an alternative source for drinking water. On Dec. 15, 2016 test results conducted by the Office of Public Health showed elevated levels of lead in two samples – a private residence and the Town Hall. Also, there were two other sites with elevated levels of copper – both were private residences. The Town of St. Joseph has experienced water problems for years due to the poorly maintained and deteriorating water distribution system. Frequent breaks in the water distribution system provide a potential health risk because of the drop in water pressure.

Out of an abundance of caution, **the Louisiana Department of Health recommends that residents use an alternative source of water for personal consumption, including making ice, brushing teeth or using it for preparing food (including mixing baby formula), and rinsing of foods.**

The Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) has released one month's supply of bottled water to the Town of St. Joseph. Each individual will receive 3 liters of water per day. The bottled water supply will serve as a temporary remedy. A more permanent source will be made available to the Town of St. Joseph while construction is underway.

### **Where do I pick up drinking water?**

Residents can pick up 3 liters of water per day at the Town Hall building on Main Street.

### **What is lead? How could it affect my child's health?**

Lead is a naturally occurring bluish-gray metal found in small amounts in the earth's crust. Lead can be found in all parts of our environment. Much of it comes from human activities including burning fossil fuels, mining, and manufacturing. Lead can get into drinking water by leaching from pipes in homes and/or the water delivery system. Increased levels of lead can lead to growth delay, learning disabilities, attention disorders and behavioral problems.

### **What should I do if I suspect I or my child was exposed to lead?**

If you suspect that you or your child has been exposed to lead, visit your doctor for testing. It is recommended that children age 6 or younger be tested for lead exposure during routine well-care checks with their doctor.

**How could copper affect my health?**

Everyone requires small amounts of copper every day because copper is essential for good health. However, high levels of copper can be harmful when consumed over long periods of time.

**What about manganese? Iron?**

Manganese and iron are essential nutrients that are required for health; they are present in many foods, particularly vegetables that contribute to daily intake. Children are more vulnerable to elevated manganese and iron, exposure should be limited.

**What should I do if I am pregnant?**

Pregnant women should consume about 10 cups of water each day. Bottled water is recommended for drinking, cooking, rinsing food, making ice, and brushing teeth.

**Can my pet or companion animal drink tap water?**

No. Companion animals should follow the same guidelines as humans. Persons with livestock should contact the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry for information at 1-866-927-2476.

**How will my water be tested?**

Beginning the week of 12/19, the Louisiana Department of Health will begin testing water for every home in the town of St. Joseph.

Throughout the course of the week, each home will receive an empty bottle and instructions to collect a water sample. Residents can choose to collect the sample on their own; can allow state personnel to collect the sample; or can choose not to participate in sampling.

State personnel will be working throughout the community over the next two weeks to distribute bottles and [instructions for sampling](#), as well as collecting samples. Once the collection of water samples is complete, residents will receive individual letters with the testing results. It will take between two and four weeks for residents to receive their testing results.

Should residents have questions, they are advised to call 1-866-280-7287.

**When will I have the results from testing, and how will I get them?**

The testing will take two to four weeks. As soon as each individual's results are complete, they will be provided to the home owner.

**What should I do if I did not receive a bottle for sample collection or if my sample was not collected?**

Call the Louisiana Office of Public Health at 1-866-280-7287.

**Can I wash dishes with the water from my faucet in St. Joseph?**

Yes, but dry them after. Wash dishes, bottles, and toys with unfiltered soapy

Water, dry before use. Lead in water will not be absorbed by porcelain, metal, or glass.

**Can I wash clothes with the water?**

Yes. Washing clothes with tap water will not impact your health.

**Can I bathe? Can I bathe my child?**

**Everyone can** wash hands, bathe, or shower with water from the tap. **Do not** leave small children unsupervised in the bathtub to eliminate small ingestion of water by mouth. Lead does not enter the body through the skin.

**Can I water my garden? Can I eat the fruits/vegetables from my garden?**

Based on available data, fruits and vegetables are unlikely to be contaminated by routine watering. Remember to rinse your fruits and vegetables with bottled water prior to consumption.

**Will filtering my water improve the quality (for activities other than drinking)?**

Placing a filter on water line to the house or in the house (kitchen sink) may improve the water quality if the filter is properly installed and maintained. Filters can clog and cause water quality to deteriorate if not properly maintained. Homeowners are advised to change the filter media/cartridge according to manufacturer's recommendations. However, during the reconstruction of the water system the filter media/cartridge may need to be changed more frequently and in some cases replacement of the media may need to be done weekly.

Also, homeowners are advised to only use a filter that is NSF-certified (53 or 58) and designed to remove metals (lead, iron, manganese, etc.). The filter packaging will say if the filter is NSF-certified and what is removed by the filter. Local Lowe's or Home Depot sell these NSF-certified filter units. The price varies and will be higher for the whole-home units versus the under-sink/faucet units. See below for the link on NSF standards (53 and 58) and Lead reduction.

<http://www.nsf.org/consumer-resources/health-and-safety-tips/water-quality-treatment-tips/standards-for-water-treatment-systems>

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Boiling water will not reduce lead or copper levels. The Louisiana Department of Health recommends that residents use an alternative source of water for personal consumption, including making ice, brushing teeth or using it for preparing food (including mixing baby formula), and rinsing of foods.