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Massachusetts Officials Announce Programs to Address Lead in Drinking Water at Schools and Child Care Facilities

Programs will offer free testing for lead in water fixtures and \$5 million in grants for water bottle filling stations

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Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

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BOSTON – In a continuing effort to ensure safe drinking water for children across the Commonwealth, the Baker-Polito Administration, Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, and the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust have launched two programs to support lead testing and mitigation in schools and early education and care facilities across the Commonwealth. The Massachusetts Department of Environment Protection’s (MassDEP) Expanded Assistance Program for Free Sampling and Analysis at Schools and Early Education and Care Facilities will continue the Commonwealth’s nation-leading program offering free lead testing and technical assistance to eligible public schools and public and private group child care facilities. In addition, the Clean Water Trust’s School Water Improvement Grant (SWIG) program will make available \$5 million in grants to cover the cost of water bottle filling stations to address detections of lead in drinking water at eligible public schools.

“Protecting the health and safety of all of the Commonwealth’s children is a top priority for our administration, which is why over the last three years we have provided free water sampling and technical assistance to almost a thousand schools across the Commonwealth,” **said Governor Charlie Baker.** “With these new programs, we are both continuing that assistance while building on it by helping schools and daycare facilities that have found unsafe lead levels address this serious issue.”

“As Chair of the Clean Water Trust, I am pleased to partner with MassDEP on this critical work,” **said State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg.** “The School Water Improvement Grant program expands our testing efforts to protect the health and safety of children throughout the Commonwealth.”

“Our Administration is dedicated to working with school districts and child care facilities to ensure that all water supplied within Massachusetts schools remains clean, fresh and safe to consume,” **said Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito.** “We are proud to now offer free water bottle filling stations to ensure students have access to clean water, and are grateful to the EPA for their grant which will help us continue to provide free lead sampling and technical assistance to the facilities that are educating and caring for our children.”

Under current federal and state laws, lead testing in schools is voluntary. Water supplied to schools is generally free of lead, but lead can be introduced into drinking water through plumbing and fixtures in buildings – especially in facilities more than 20 years old.

These two programs are designed to encourage education and care facilities to perform lead testing and address elevated levels with the help of state experts. MassDEP’s Expanded Assistance Program, funded through a \$967,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, will help eligible facilities implement effective testing programs, educate them about how to address elevated lead levels, including through the new SWIG program, and provide water quality information to the school community.

The Clean Water Trust’s SWIG program, funded through a \$5 million appropriation from Governor Baker’s FY19 supplemental state budget, will provide grants to school districts that have tested their drinking water through the Commonwealth’s lead testing program or other comparable testing for water bottle filling stations. These filtered fixtures will be used to reduce the levels lead in school drinking water. Grant awards will be calculated based on a per fixture award of \$3,000. The number of fixtures will be based on the number of required fixtures to meet the Commonwealth’s Plumbing Code student to drinking fixture ratio of 75 students to one drinking water fixture.

“Our prior testing assistance programs supported the collection of almost 68,000 samples at 991 facilities, and we pleased to be able to help even more educational facilities test for lead in their drinking water,” **said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides.** “With the new School Water Improvement Grant program, facilities have a great opportunity to apply for water bottle filling stations that can help address elevated levels.”

“We are committed to working closely with our local cities and towns to ensure that all students have access to safe and fresh water,” **said Secretary of Administration and Finance Michael J. Heffernan.** “By offering these new programs and resources, we can identify and address instances of unsafe lead levels in drinking water and help even more schools and childcare facilities provide clean water to children.”

In 2016, Governor Charlie Baker and Treasurer Deborah Goldberg [launched](#) [\(/news/massachusetts-officials-to-provide-2-million-to-test-for-lead-in-drinking-water-at-public\)](#) the Commonwealth’s Assistance Program for Lead in School Drinking Water, which provided schools and early education and childcare programs no-cost testing for lead in their facilities’ drinking water and guidance on remedial actions.

“Protecting children from exposure to lead is critically important to EPA,” **said EPA Region 1 Administrator Dennis Deziel.** “Through these new initiatives, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts once again has demonstrated why it’s a national leader in protecting children where they are most vulnerable. EPA is proud to invest in and partner with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to reduce lead in drinking water in schools and early education and care facilities. Every parent should take comfort in the Commonwealth’s pioneering programs to reduce childhood lead poisoning.”

“We are pleased to be able to further extend this technical assistance and water sampling program to allow even more schools, child care facilities, and parents to participate,” **said MassDEP Commissioner Martin Suuberg.** “As all the test results will be available online, our expanded assistance program provides communities with the readily accessible and transparent information that they need to be fully informed about the water quality present in their child’s education and care environment.”

In addition to these resources, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) will continue to provide free laboratory testing to the school and early education and care facilities located in communities served by the MWRA.

“Children and lead are a dangerous combination,” **said MWRA Executive Director Fred Laskey.** “It’s imperative that we continue to do everything we can to reduce exposure to lead from all sources. The programs we’re talking about here today will go a long way to further that goal.”

Both the Expanded Assistance Program and SWIG will be accepting applications for assistance online. The [Expanded Assistance Program \(/assistance-program-for-lead-in-school-drinking-water\)](#) is accepting applications immediately and the [SWIG Program \(/swig\)](#) will accept applications from February 3 to March 6, 2020.

“Access to clean drinking water is critical to a healthy and productive learning environment for every student in every school across Boston,” **said Brenda Cassellius, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools.** “Boston Public Schools is honored to have played a role in advocating for infrastructure and bottle refill station funding for schools, and to have influenced drinking water policy for public school systems through our invaluable partnership with MassDEP’s Drinking Water Program.”

“Our aging water infrastructure increases the risk of lead in our drinking water, not just at home but also in our schools,” **said State Senator Ryan Fattman (R-Sutton).** “In conjunction with voluntary federal and state lead testing laws, it is great to see programs being put in place by the Baker-Polito Administration, Treasurer Goldberg, MA Clean Water Trust, and MassDEP to encourage more frequent lead testing in our schools with the help of state experts. It is important that we take advantage of the resources at the state-level to eliminate harmful toxins from our drinking water and mitigate any unnecessary risks to our youth.”

“In 2020, students should not still have to ingest lead while having a drink of water in schools,” **said State Senator Joan Lovely (D-Salem).** “I am pleased that the Massachusetts School Water Improvement Grants will help to address this unacceptable situation, and am hopeful that legislation that Rep. Ehrlich and I filed will advance so that all children in the Commonwealth will finally have access to safe drinking water regardless of where they go to school.”

“I am extremely excited about the implementation of these programs to help schools find and address lead in their drinking water,” **said State Representative Smitty Pignatelli (D-Lenox).** “The children of Massachusetts deserve nothing less than the safest school experience, and these programs will serve as a wonderful complement to the work that we in the legislature are doing on this exact issue.”

“We have some of the oldest infrastructure in the nation and it is important that we provide access to programs such as this to encourage our schools to test its drinking water,” **said State Representative James Kelcourse (R-Amesbury)**.

“No amount of lead exposure is safe for the developing brain,” **said State Representative Lori Ehrlich (D-Marblehead)**. “I’m proud to stand with my colleagues across state government to expand testing and remediation so we can measure the problem and then fix it. Every child and teacher in Massachusetts deserves nothing less.”

About the Clean Water Trust

Since its establishment in 1989, the Clean Water Trust has loaned nearly \$7.6 billion to improve and maintain the quality of water in the Commonwealth. An estimated 97 percent of Massachusetts’ residents have benefited from the financial assistance of the Trust.

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The Massachusetts Clean Water Trust

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The Massachusetts Clean Water Trust (the Trust) is a state agency that improves water quality throughout the Commonwealth by providing low-interest loans to municipalities and other eligible entities.

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