



For Immediate Release
January 25, 2019

Contact: Gillian Conrad, 269-927-5624

Benton Harbor residents encouraged to take steps to prevent lead exposure

(Benton Harbor) – The Berrien County Health Department provided Benton Harbor residents with updated recommendations to prevent potential lead exposure from drinking water at a town hall meeting on January 24th, 2019. Out of an abundance of caution, the Berrien County Health Department recommends that all Benton Harbor residents flush their water for at least five minutes or use an NSF Standard 53 certified filter to remove lead from the water.

The Berrien County Health Department will offer water filters certified to reduce lead in the water at no cost to residents. Efforts are currently underway to provide these filters to homes known to have high levels of lead in their water. Filters will be available to any Benton Harbor resident who would like one beginning the week of February 4th, 2019. More information regarding water filter distribution times and locations will be released next week.

The Berrien County Health Department continues to offer blood testing and monitor the blood lead levels of children under age six and throughout the county, as children under the age of 6 are at the greatest risk of lead exposure. Benton Harbor residents can have their children tested for lead in their blood at InterCare Community Health Network (800 M-139, Benton Harbor), at Spectrum Health Lakeland Center for Outpatient Services (3900 Hollywood Road, St. Joseph), or at the Berrien County Health Department (2149 E. Napier Ave, Benton Harbor). There have been no detected increases in elevated blood lead levels in Benton Harbor children and data evaluation will continue. Trends show elevated blood lead levels have been decreasing since 2011.

In October 2018, the City of Benton Harbor issued a public advisory to notify water customers that the water system had exceeded the 90th percentile for lead. This required further investigation into the source of the lead. Additional water testing recently conducted by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services resulted in the increased recommended flushing time and filter use. Testing is ongoing and future recommendations may change as more results are collected.

All Benton Harbor water customers are reminded to take the following precautionary actions to reduce their exposure to lead:

- Use a water filter certified to remove lead from the water, or an NSF 53 Certified filter.

- Residents who do not have a filter and have not used their water for six hours or more should flush their pipes to reduce the amount of lead in their drinking water. Pipes can be flushed by running faucets, taking a shower, running a load of laundry or washing dishes for at least five minutes. After flushing, run the water from your faucet until cold before drinking or cooking with the water.
- Use cold tap water for drinking and cooking.
- Use bottled water for preparing baby formula or use Ready-to-Feed formula.
- Do not boil the water, as boiling will not reduce the amount of lead in the water.
- Clean faucets' aerators or screens at least every six months. For more information on how to clean your aerator, see the "[Cleaning Your Aerators](#)" fact sheet.

More information about lead in drinking water can be found at www.bchdmi.org or at the Berrien County Health Department Facebook page.

###