

# Getting the **Lead** out of TX Schools

**URGENCY:** There is lead in the drinking water of our public schools and childcare facilities.

Of the 9,559 public schools in Texas, 1,509 have already tested for lead in drinking water. **78% of these schools have identified lead contamination.** 8,000+ schools remain untested.<sup>1</sup>

Even low levels of lead poisoning<sup>2</sup> during pregnancy or childhood have been linked to lifelong impairments, brain damage, and health problems.<sup>3</sup>

(Photo Credit: [Nasos Zovolis via Flickr](#))



**LEGISLATION:** Proposed legislation would direct TCEQ to develop guidelines for ISDs and open-enrollment charter schools to adopt plans for healthy and safe drinking water to keep lead levels below 15 parts per billion.

These guidelines and plans will create a roadmap for reducing exposure to lead in drinking water through efforts by water utilities including testing, mitigation efforts, repairs, and reporting to TCEQ, drawing on available state and federal funding.

\*\*\*\*\* [HB 5552](#) (Plesa) | House Budget rider (Gervin-Hawkins) | [SB 191](#) (Menendez) \*\*\*\*\*



**HOW IT WORKS:** Together, the bills and budget rider envision that:

- TCEQ adopts guidelines and grant programs for water utilities;
- ISDs and open-enrollment charter schools adopt plans to facilitate testing, mitigation, and repairs by water utilities; and
- Water utilities conduct testing, disclose test results to schools and TCEQ, and draw from various funding sources to mitigate and remediate any lead contamination.

(Photo Credit: [Nasos Zovolis via Flickr](#))

**FUNDING:** TCEQ's existing voluntary Lead Testing in School and Child Care Program provides resources, including water filters, for schools and childcare centers that have done testing.<sup>4</sup> Currently, this program is supported exclusively by federal funding.

A budget rider by Rep. Gervin Hawkins would boost funding for this program, investing \$5M over the biennium for lead remediation in schools and daycare centers.



**SUPPORT:** Since the 83rd Legislative Session, a coalition of support has been growing in partnership with a bipartisan group of lawmakers to develop and refine the proposed policy. Two organizations have been leading this effort: the Texas chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council ([USGBC Texas](#)) and the Texas Association of School Boards ([TASB](#)).

<sup>1</sup> [New analysis: 78% of tested Texas schools, daycares have found lead in drinking water.](#) Environment Texas (2024).

<sup>2</sup> [Lead Poisoning - Overview.](#) World Health Organization (accessed in Mar 2025).

<sup>3</sup> [CDC Updates Blood Lead Reference Value.](#) Centers for Disease Control - Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention (2024).

<sup>4</sup> [Voluntary Lead Testing in School and Child Care Drinking Water.](#) Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (accessed in Mar 2025).

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## LEAD IN OUR SCHOOLS' DRINKING WATER:

A patchwork of federal laws and programs has left little focus on prioritizing removing lead from drinking water in public schools without state action – and **several states are already taking action**.<sup>5</sup> Most schools do not have lead service lines that carry supply water into the school. According to experts, lead contamination of schools' water in Texas largely stems from interior plumbing, fountains, and fixtures.

(photo credit: [Fuji and I via Flickr](#))

The proposed legislation requires utilities companies to perform lead testing at all schools and daycare facilities in order to remove harmful levels of lead in drinking water.

In children, low levels of lead exposure have been linked to damage to the central and peripheral nervous system,<sup>6</sup> learning disabilities, shorter stature, impaired hearing, and impaired formation and function of blood cells. Lead causes problems in bones, teeth, blood, liver, kidneys, and the brain. **Lead stays in the body forever,<sup>7</sup> and has a litany of adverse health effects.**<sup>8</sup> Children have been shown to absorb more than double the amount of consumed lead compared to adults – on an empty stomach it is often 100%.<sup>9</sup>

An analysis by Environment Texas Research and Policy Center in October 2024 found that of the 1,509 schools and daycare centers that reported data to the TCEQ, 1,175 (**nearly 78%**) **identified lead in school drinking water**.<sup>10</sup> Legislators can look up test results in their districts at TCEQ's page for the Lead Testing in School and Child Care Program: <https://www.txleadtesting.org/public-results>

## SOCIAL COSTS:

Research reveals an **association between lead exposure delinquent, criminal, and antisocial behavior** at the population level.<sup>11,12</sup> Further, for every \$1 spent on corrections, there are \$10 in additional social costs.<sup>13</sup> Lead poisoning costs us all.<sup>14</sup>

The annual cost of childhood lead exposure in the United States is \$50 billion. For every \$1 invested to reduce lead hazards in American homes, society would benefit by an estimated \$17 to \$221.<sup>15</sup>



(Photo Credit: [Jose Castillo H via Flickr](#))

## ACTION:

With the proposed policy, members of the Texas House and Senate can **act now to protect our children from toxic drinking water** and the associated threats to public health, general welfare, and state spending. To co-sponsor, please contact Jordan Villarreal in Rep. Plesa's office at [jordan.villarreal@house.texas.gov](mailto:jordan.villarreal@house.texas.gov).

<sup>5</sup> [Perspectives on State Legislation Concerning Lead Testing in School Drinking Water](#). U.S. Green Building Council (2018).

<sup>6</sup> [Basic Information about Lead in Drinking Water: Health Effects of Exposures to Lead in Drinking Water](#). U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (accessed in Mar 2025).

<sup>7</sup> [What is the Biological Fate of Lead in the Body?](#) U.S. Centers for Disease Control - Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (2023).

<sup>8</sup> [Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity](#). Council on Environmental Health, Bruce Perrin Lanphear, MD, et al. Pediatrics (2017) 140 (2): e20171490.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote #7.

<sup>10</sup> [Program Results: Lead Testing in Schools & Child Care](#). Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (accessed in Mar 2025).

<sup>11</sup> See footnote #8.

<sup>12</sup> [The association between lead exposure and crime: A systematic review](#). Talayero MJ, Robbins CR, Smith ER, Santos-Burgoa C (2023). PLOS Glob Public Health 3(8): e0002177.

<sup>13</sup> [The Economic Burden of Incarceration in the United States](#). Michael McLaughlin et al. Institute of Justice Research and Development at Florida State University's College of Social Work (2016).

<sup>14</sup> See footnote #8.

<sup>15</sup> [Childhood Lead Poisoning: Conservative Estimates of the Social and Economic Benefits of Lead Hazard Control](#). Elise Gould. Environmental Health Perspectives (2009) 117(7):1162-7.