

NEWS RELEASE

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New study: From Buffalo to Montauk school building drinking water commonly tested above state lead limits

Half of Albany County school buildings tested above state limits for lead in school drinking water

Groups call on Hochul administration, NY state legislature to rapidly implement new protections

Albany, N.Y. [NYPIRG](#) and [Environment America Research & Policy Center](#) co-released a new report on their websites today. It contains statewide and county-by-county data about lead in water used for cooking and drinking in New York state's schools. The study includes data from school districts from Buffalo to Montauk.

Get the Lead Out New York showed that approximately nearly one out of every two schools had drinking water samples contaminated with lead. Pediatricians say [lead is unsafe at any level](#) for children. The new report reinforces the concerns that prompted Environment America Research & Policy Center to assign New York a [“C” grade](#) for its policies on lead in school's water in 2023.

"As disappointing as they are, our findings may just be the tip of the toxic iceberg when it comes to lead in school drinking water," stated **Environment America Research & Policy Center Senior Advocate David Masur**. "Given significant loopholes in the law, hundreds, if not thousands, of drinking fountains contaminated with lead could go unreported and unaddressed each year."

"New York's schoolchildren have begun another year yet still face the threat of lead exposure. As this report shows, too many schools still have lead contamination in their drinking water supplies. State policymakers must act," **said NYPIRG Senior Policy Advisor Blair Horner**. "Next year's legislative session must be the year that New York gets the lead out of its schools."

Alongside the report, an interactive web page allows New Yorkers to see how many school drinking fountains tested positive for lead in their home counties. [The web tool](#) also can provide county-to-county comparisons.

Some of the report's major findings include:

- 12,452 water outlets at New York State public schools tested above the state's 5 parts per billion (ppb) threshold for lead;
- 42% of school buildings across New York state (1,918 schools) reported at least one water outlet used for drinking or cooking, where lead levels exceeded 5 ppb in the most recent complete testing data reported by schools to the Department of Health;
- 60% of school buildings in each Schenectady County and Schoharie County had at least one water outlet positive for lead above 5ppb.
- Both Columbia and Hamilton counties ranked in the state's top ten counties for the percentage of water outlets testing above 5ppb, ranking 6th and 7th respectively. In Columbia County, 14.9% of all outlets tested above the state's 5ppb threshold, and 14.7% of schools in Hamilton County tested above that benchmark.
- 50% of the Albany County schools had drinking water samples contaminated with lead.

State law only requires school districts to repair water sources that test positive for lead at 5 ppb or higher. But given the inherent variability of lead in water, only treating taps where water exceeded this level of lead during testing has left persistent contamination problems at many schools. Furthermore, many other tested water sources contain lead below 5 ppb, so schools don't remediate the problem in those places even though *any* lead can threaten a child's health.

NYPIRG and the Environment America Research & Policy Center recommend that state and local officials implement the following policies as quickly as possible to address the widespread threat of lead contamination in school drinking water:

- Require the installation of lead-capturing filters on all taps used for drinking, cooking and beverage preparation.
- Set a 1 ppb limit on lead in school drinking water, a policy recommended by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).
- New York state school districts should begin implementing these steps as soon as possible, not wait for Albany to mandate action.

Get the Lead Out New York was developed using self-reported lead testing data supplied to the New York State Department of Health by 4,514 public schools and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) locations across the state.

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The New York Public Interest Research Group Fund (NYPIRG) is a non-partisan, nonprofit, research and public education organization. NYPIRG was founded in 1976 as an independent 501(c)(3) public outreach and education sister organization to the New York Public Interest Research Group.

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