

For immediate release

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Drinking Water in Valley Schools is Safe

Comox Valley, B.C. – Students, staff and families can rest assured that the drinking water provided in all Comox Valley Schools is safe.

A recent national investigative report on the quality of the tap water of several schools across Canada revealed high concentration of lead.

Mitigation efforts and ongoing rigorous testing, however, have ensured drinking water in all Comox Valley School facilities is safe.

“Our goal is to maintain safe learning environments that are free from harm including exposure to contaminants of any kind,” shared Demeo. “Our commitment is to ensure that all schools have access to clean, safe, drinkable water.”

Since 2016, all School District 71 schools and facilities constructed prior to 1989 have been annually tested for lead in the water. Guided by advice from health authorities, the school district uses an accredited, independent laboratory to test the water quality, specifically for lead content.

The school district uses the Random Daytime (RDT) sampling protocol recommended by Island Health Authority to capture typical exposures including potential exposure to particulate lead. Health Canada mandated in March 2019 that the Maximum Allowable Concentration (MAC) be lowered from the previous level of 10 ug/L to a new stringent standard of 5µg/L (5.0ppb). Water quality is tested twice annually.

“Our testing, maintenance and improvement efforts over the years has enabled us to remain well-informed of the lead levels in our water,” explained Tom Demeo, Superintendent of Schools. “Our most recent test results demonstrate that water qualities in the District remain within the acceptable thresholds for lead content as mandated by Health Canada.”

In April 2019, an Environmental Health report by Island Health summarized that the school district had completed 100 percent of their (pre-1989) schools and facilities and remediated all areas that were shown to exceed the MAC for lead.

In schools where water tests exceed the MAC, the District has taken further mitigation measures by installing fountains to ensure drinking water quality meets the regulated health standards.

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Comox Valley Schools Protocol

Island Health Authority recommends sampling 10% of drinking water fountains and cold water taps where water is used for drinking or food preparation. The protocol recommends that samples be taken:

- At random times throughout the school day
- During the year to represent exposure during the school day preferably and in early fall and spring because leaching of lead increases with higher water temperatures
- Two consecutive 125 mL samples should be collected at each fountain or tap without a stagnation period and without prior flushing.

Island Health further recommends that, in parallel with our school sampling program, the school district conduct ongoing maintenance of any infrastructure installed as a remediation measure (e.g. auto-flush valves, filters, etc.) to ensure effective operations.

“We also have developed a thorough written plan for the ongoing maintenance that outlines procedures and timelines and will review all existing data to ensure that no sites exceed the MAC level of lead,” added Demeo.

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