

Date: June 11, 2020

To: Child Care Facility Owners/Operators

Re: Flushing and Sampling in Child Care Centres Before Reopening

Nothing is more important than protecting the health and well-being of Ontarians. As child care centres prepare to reopen, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is reminding child care centres of flushing and sampling requirements guidance to help facilities ensure that the water is safe to drink before opening their buildings to staff and children.

Since first learning of COVID-19, Ontario has taken decisive action to stop the spread of this virus, including ordering the closure of non-essential businesses, which included most child care centres with the exception of those serving frontline and health care workers. As most of these facilities have been vacant for an extended time, the water in the plumbing has been unused and will be stagnant. Stagnant water can pose a risk to human health and can also cause leaching of lead from plumbing and water fixtures into the water.

For this reason, we are reminding all operators of child care centres to **ensure that water flushing occurs prior to re-opening** so that the water quality in the building is restored. Flushing reduces potential exposure to lead in drinking water because it prevents water from standing in the plumbing for too long, which reduces its contact time with pipes and plumbing.

In addition to the flushing requirements, if your child care facility gets its water from a private water source, like a drinking water well, you are required by Section 12(4) of [Ontario Regulation 170/03](#) to take microbiological samples and receive the results prior to reopening.

Please review the following information for facility owners, building managers and maintenance personnel to ensure that drinking water is safe at your child care centre before children and staff return.

When a Child Care Centre is Considered “Open”

A child care centre is considered open when, at any time during the day, a child that is being cared for is present in the facility.

Flushing your plumbing system

Schools, private schools and child care centres are required to routinely flush their plumbing following [Ontario Regulation for Schools, Private Schools and Childcare Centres \(243/07\)](#). The frequency of flushing depends on several factors, including:

- The age of the plumbing in the building (older buildings are more likely to have lead plumbing)
- Lead test results from previous drinking water sampling
- The location and use of drinking water fixtures (any fixture used to prepare food or drink)
- If there is an NSF certified filter installed on a drinking water fixture.

Ontario Regulation 243/07 requires all flushing activities, whether conducting daily or weekly, to be completed before the facility opens for the day. The required flushing records must also be updated to confirm where, when and by whom these flushing activities were completed (see “Maintaining Records” below).

Initial Flushing After Extended Vacancy

The ministry recommends flushing all “end of branches” (the last tap on each branch or run of pipe in the plumbing that serves a drinking water fixture) with cold water until it becomes noticeably colder in temperature to ensure that fresh water from the mains fills the plumbing before reopening the facility. Since most facilities have been closed for over two months, it is likely that the water in the plumbing has been sitting for a long time.

After the initial “end of branch” flush is complete, cold water must be turned on for at least 10 seconds at every drinking water fixture in the facility. This will ensure that the fresh water from the water main reaches drinking water fixtures that are used to provide water for consumption of any kind, including food or drink preparation.

Once this work is complete, the facility may return to its regular flushing schedule, whether daily or weekly, as required during normal operations.

Sampling Requirements

Lead Sampling - Ontario Regulation 243/07

Under the law ([Ontario Regulation 243/07](#)) lead samples must be taken from all drinking water fountains and taps at schools, private schools and child care centres in the province. Childcare centres and primary schools (both public and private) were required to complete the lead testing of all drinking water fixtures by January 1, 2020. The remainder of the schools (non-primary) are required to complete the lead testing of all drinking water fixtures by January 1, 2022.

Once all of the drinking water fixtures in a facility have been sampled by the regulatory deadlines stated above, each facility is then required to continue to collect at least one set of lead samples annually between May 1 and October 31.

Before collecting any samples for the 2020 sampling window, facilities are strongly encouraged to:

- Contact their licensed laboratory to ensure they are able to analyze lead samples at this time
- Ensure that the plumbing in the facility has been thoroughly flushed and is being used at what could be considered a normal rate
- Consult past sampling records and results to ensure that all drinking water fixtures have been sampled as required by O. Reg. 243/07.

Microbiological Sampling

[Ontario Regulation for Drinking Water Systems 170/03](#) regulates designated facilities that operate their own drinking water systems because they get their water from a private source such as a well. These facilities must take microbiological samples and obtain the results prior to reopening to the public.

If your child care facility is classified as a designated facility under [Ontario Regulation 170/03](#), in addition to the Ontario Regulation 243/07 requirements noted above, you are also required to take microbiological samples and receive the results before re-opening to the public, as per the requirements of section 12-4 of [Ontario Regulation 170/03](#).

If your childcare facility receives municipally supplied water, then you do not need to take the microbiological samples referenced above, you are still required to follow all of the [Ontario Regulation 243/07](#) requirements summarized in this letter.

Maintaining Records

[Sections 8 and 9](#) of Ontario Regulation 243/07 specify the records that are required to be available to the public and for ministry inspection. Flushing records are only required when a facility is open and flushing activities take place.

Additional Information and Guidance

Guides, posters, signs and instructional resources on flushing and sampling are also available online at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/flushing-and-sampling-lead>. A guide for owners/operators of designated facilities is available here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/providing-safe-drinking-water-public-guide-owners-and-operators-non-residential-and-seasonal>.

For child care facilities that are in a building that has had low occupancy or been vacant for some time, it should be noted that water quality in the building may also be compromised. Your building manager should be contacted to ensure they are taking appropriate measures to flush the entire building. The Ministry has developed a Guide for Maintaining Building Plumbing After an Extended Vacancy to help building managers understand their responsibilities. This will be made available shortly. Additional resources that may be helpful are available from <https://cwwa.ca/covid-19-and-the-re-opening-of-buildings/#download/>.

Ontario's drinking water remains among the best protected in the world. Working with our partners, our strong protection framework will continue to help ensure our drinking water is held to Ontario's high safety standards.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email: R243LeadSelf-Report@Ontario.ca, or call: 1-855-515-1331.

Thank you,

Lisa Trevisan
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