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For Immediate Release

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HCS Conducts Latest Round of School Water Testing

Hamilton County Schools (HCS) places the highest priority on the safety of our students and staff. This includes environmental factors, like water quality.

Under Tennessee Code Annotated 49-2-133, local boards of education are required to periodically test for lead in drinking water sources. To safeguard the health of our students and staff, HCS has conducted ongoing sampling, testing, and reporting for lead in drinking water across all its schools for the past two years. In terms of allowable lead limits and schools being tested, HCS has adopted guidelines that go beyond the law's requirements.

According to state law, if a water sample tests at or above 20 parts per billion (ppb), the school shall immediately remove the drinking water source from service. Hamilton County Schools (HCS) has adopted a stricter standard of 15 ppb to immediately remove the drinking water source from service until corrective action can be taken. Additionally, HCS has sampled all schools, even though only buildings built prior to 1998 are required by state law.

In 2020, we began testing water outlets at our schools for lead as part of a new regulation in Tennessee for schools built prior to 1998. During Summer 2020, samples were collected from over 2,000 different water outlets at 53 schools. During Summer 2021, over 1,000 additional samples were collected as part of a voluntary effort at schools built in 1998 or later.

In 2022, we are working to retest all schools built prior to 1998 that were originally tested in 2020 (now 52 schools as Harrison Elementary was reestablished in a new building in 2021). Samples from 24 schools were collected over spring break, and the remaining pre-1998 schools will be sampled during the summer.

Out of 760 samples recently collected at the 24 schools, six (0.8%) samples included lead at a concentration at or greater than the state's limit of 20 ppb. Three others tested at or above the HCS limit of 15 ppb, but less than 20 ppb. Each of these nine water outlets were immediately removed from use, and remediation work and retesting will be performed as soon as possible. Each of the nine affected fixtures is in a different facility. There are no concerns with the overall quality or safety of drinking water at any of the tested facilities. (The list of 24 tested schools, noting those with anomalies, is included at the end of this release.)

"Hamilton County Schools is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for our students and staff," said HCS Chief Operations Officer Dr. Robert Sharpe. "As a part of that commitment, we have held

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ourselves to stricter water testing standards than those required by the state, and we have worked to be transparent about our test results to school families and our community. Today's release of our most recent test results is the latest step in that process."

Families of students at the 24 tested schools will receive an email notification detailing the results at their schools. Copies of those letters, as well as complete testing results, can be found on the [District Water Testing website](#).

Why Test?

Lead typically enters drinking water due to the wearing away of piping, faucets, fixtures, and other plumbing materials. Because lead is tasteless, odorless, and colorless in drinking water, testing is a way to learn if lead is present. It is important to sample each faucet or water fountain that is used for drinking or food prep because test results can vary between outlets and various water chemistry changes can change levels over time. HCS has been working with a contractor to utilize results to identify and remediate sources of lead. When a test result indicates elevated lead content, additional testing is conducted to determine the source of the lead. Once that investigation, corrective action, and retesting are complete, the water sources may be reopened. HCS will continue to provide updates and share all testing data along the way.

Results

Understanding Results

We are committed to keeping you informed every step of the way as we test and improve the water quality in our schools. Lead test results from the past three years can be viewed in a table on the [District Water Testing website](#). The EPA action level is 15 ppb. State of TN school lead testing requires sources over 20 ppb to be removed from service until corrective action can be taken. HCS is remediating any source over 15 ppb. All sources over 15 ppb have been immediately removed from service. The corrective action columns show a brief description of actions taken, as needed. Results that are below the laboratory detection limit, indicated with a less than sign, mean that the laboratory was not able to detect lead in the sample. The source ID is a unique identifier for the drinking water outlet, associated with information collected about location and outlet type.

How are Samples Collected?

Samples are collected following a standard operating procedure incorporating the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Training, Testing, and Taking Action (3Ts) program and the requirements of the state legislation. Water must be standing in plumbing overnight before samples are collected. A "first draw" sample of water that has been standing in plumbing overnight will be collected in laboratory supplied sample bottles. Each sample is assigned a unique number and each source will be tagged with a sticker displaying the unique number. The sample is then supplied to a separate qualified laboratory for conducting chemical analyses.

Spring 2022 Water Testing

| School | Variations |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Barger Academy | None |
| Bess T. Shepherd Elementary | 1 |
| Big Ridge Elementary | 1 |
| Brown Middle | None |
| Calvin Donaldson Elementary | None |
| Central High | 1 |
| Clifton Hills Elementary | None |
| East Ridge High | 1 |
| East Ridge Middle | None |
| Hixson Elementary | None |
| Hixson High | None |
| The Howard School | 1 |
| Howard Connect Academy | None |
| Loftis Middle | None |
| Lookout Mountain Elementary | None |
| Lookout Valley Elementary | None |
| Lookout Valley Middle/High | 1 |
| McConnell Elementary | None |
| Ooltewah High | None |
| Ooltewah Middle | 1 |
| Spring Creek Elementary | None |
| Tyner Academy | None |
| Tyner Middle Academy | 1 |
| Wolftever Creek Elementary | 1 |