

Information sessions held for parents, staff with concerns about water testing results at two Hampton Roads child care facilities

By David Todd | Navy Region Mid-Atlantic Public Affairs | Posted: Friday, March 29, 2013 4:18 pm

NORFOLK -- Naval Station (NAVSTA) Norfolk held information sessions for parents and staff members after drinking water at two child development centers tested above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) recommended level for lead, March 29.

To date, nearly 300 water outlets have been individually tested at nine facilities onboard Joint Expeditionary Base (JEB) Little Creek-Fort Story and NAVSTA Norfolk, and there are plans to test an additional 14 facilities in Hampton Roads.

The information sessions were hosted to provide families and staff members an opportunity to voice their concerns and speak with installation leadership, environmental and medical representatives from Naval Medical Center Portsmouth (NMCP), and the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center. Additional sessions were also held at the NAVSTA Norfolk Child Development Center (CDC) on Hampton Blvd., April 1 - 2.

NAVSTA Norfolk and Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Mid-Atlantic, under direction of Navy Region Mid-Atlantic, began testing for lead at drinking water outlets inside 23 child care facilities in Hampton Roads, including Child Development Centers, 24/7 Child Care facilities and Youth Centers, in September of 2012.

"The safety of our service members, staff members and their children are our top priority," said Rear Adm. Tim Alexander, Commander, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic. "We are committed to ensuring that our drinking water meets both the Navy and EPA environmental standards, and we will provide the best possible level of care that our service members and their families deserve."

"There is nothing more important to me than the health and safety of our men and women in uniform, their families and our staff members," said Capt. David A. Culler, Jr., commanding officer of NAVSTA Norfolk. "The Navy is being very proactive, especially at the CDCs, so we can identify any issues and correct them quickly."

Tests at the NAVSTA Norfolk CDC on Hampton Blvd. resulted in seven of 72 water outlets that tested above the recommended level. Two of these were water fountains accessible to children. The other five areas were sinks used for hand washing, which were immediately secured. The second set of test results were delivered on March 26 and remained above recommended levels. The drinking fountains where children had access were removed from the facility.

JEB Fort Story CDC collected 58 total samples, in which five initially tested above the Navy and EPA standards. Four locations were used for storage and one location was a kitchen faucet intended for use by adults to only rinse dishes before placing them in the dishwasher. All five were immediately secured and corrective action was taken. After an additional test, all outlets tested within recommended levels.

The proactive testing was conducted at CDCs and Youth Centers primarily because children are more sensitive to lead exposure than adults.

“We decided to test these facilities to make sure that all of the water faucets and the water distribution system inside the buildings are under the recommended EPA screening levels for lead,” explained Liz Nashold, environmental director for Commander, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic.

For military families who are concerned and may not have be able to attend one of the information sessions, NMCP has established a Lead Information Line to answer questions. Additionally, military families can also contact their primary health care provider, or NMCP, to request a blood lead test to establish if a child has been exposed to lead.

“We set up the information line through the hospital to inform parents about reducing the risk for lead exposure, dietary intervention and simple home interventions that can be done to reduce sources of lead exposure in a child’s environment,” said Lt. Cmdr. Rhett Barrett, staff pediatrician, NMCP.

Barrett suggested that routinely allowing water to run for 30 seconds to one minute prior to drinking from a faucet can help flush out the water line and mitigate possible lead exposure. It is important to note that lead is a naturally occurring toxic metal that can be found in air, soil, dust, food and water.

Chief Machinist’s Mate Doneka Booker, a parent at the session, expressed a positive experience when she contacted the NMCP Lead Information Line.

“I left a message and was called back in less than five minutes,” explained Booker. “The lieutenant commander who answered the call took all of my information over the phone and set me up with an appointment in five minutes flat.”

Booker said, as a parent, she appreciated that Navy leadership was present at the session and thought the information presented was beneficial for all who attended.

“I am very well educated on lead exposure and know that my children or myself could be exposed to lead without being at a child care facility,” said Booker. “I appreciate the captain of the base is here to let everybody know that he is aware of what’s going on and the Navy is doing something about this.”

Military families who have children in Hampton Roads CDCs or Youth Centers can contact the NMCP Lead Information Line by calling (757) 953-1598 or DSN 377-1598, Monday through Friday. When calling, leave a message that includes your name, phone number and possible concerns. All calls will be returned promptly.

To learn more about lead in drinking water, visit <http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/lead/>, call (800) 424-LEAD or call the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at (800) 426-4791.



Testing water for lead

Liz Nashold, environmental director for Commander, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic demonstrates how first-draw samples (250 ml) are collected from faucets at Hampton Roads Child Development Centers and Youth Centers.