

Governor Rauner signs lead testing bill

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Bipartisan legislation to protect Illinois children, remove lead contamination from schools, daycare drinking water

CHICAGO – Governor Bruce Rauner joined by Reverend Jesse Jackson, State Sen. Steans and state agency directors today signed Senate Bill 550, legislation to protect Illinois children from possible exposure to lead in drinking water.

"Today is about our future, about making sure our students are not exposed to lead poisoning," said Governor Rauner. "This shows what is possible when we work together. It is a step in protecting our children from the devastating effects of lead exposure."

"Lead in the paint and in the pipes threatens the health and the futures of far too many children," Rev. Jackson said. "This is a life-saving bill. I applaud Governor Rauner for signing it."

SB 550 will ensure proper health protections are in place to protect Illinois' youngest residents. It provides the requirement for schools and daycares to sample for lead contamination from sources of potable water in school buildings. The oldest school buildings, those constructed before January 1, 1987, must complete water testing by the end of 2017. Schools constructed between January 2, 1987 and January 1, 2000 must complete testing by the end of 2018. Daycares constructed on or before January 1, 2000 and serve children under the age of 6 will also be required to conduct testing. Further, parents and guardians of students must be notified of elevated lead results.

"This legislation, along with the enhancements Illinois EPA has proactively implemented with community water supplies over the last year, is an important step towards eliminating the risk of lead exposure to our most vulnerable citizens, Illinois' children," said Illinois EPA Acting Director Alec Messina. "The public can be assured this is a top priority of the Agency and we will continue to implement program improvements and coordinate efforts with our fellow state agencies."

"Elevated levels of lead in children can cause developmental and behavioral disabilities," said IDPH Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. "We have made great progress in reducing the number of children with elevated levels and we will continue to work to protect one of our most vulnerable populations."

In addition to the requirement of testing within schools and daycares, SB 550 requires Community Water Systems to provide a comprehensive lead service line inventory to Illinois EPA and provide notice to residents when work will be done on water mains, lead services lines or water meters.

The legislation is the product of a lengthy stakeholder process including the Illinois EPA, Department of Public Health and Department of Children and Family Services, the Illinois Environmental Council as well as representatives from numerous organizations.

"I applaud the Governor for signing this important bipartisan legislation that will ensure that schools have healthy drinking water for our children," said State Senator Heather Steans (D-Chicago). With these efforts, Illinois becomes a state to model lead testing and safety after."

"We would like to thank Governor Rauner, Senator Steans, Representative Harper, and Attorney General Madigan for their leadership to protect Illinois' school children," said Bruce Hauk, President of Illinois American Water. "This bill represents a year of negotiation and collaboration with numerous stakeholders, and we are proud to have played a role in making drinking water safer for Illinois students."

“Protecting student health and safety is a responsibility all school districts emphasize,” said Zach Messersmith of the Statewide School Management Alliance. “With SB 550, we were able to ensure the drinking water in our schools is safe while also giving school districts the flexibility and resources to manage the cost.”

"With Governor Rauner's signature, this important public health initiative will benefit all Illinoisans. This legislation is a first step that will identify lead risk to children and in homes," said Illinois Environmental Council Executive Director Jen Walling. "The provisions of the bill are nation leading in identifying lead hazards and increasing transparency through parental notification of lead testing. We are grateful for the leadership of the attorney General, state agencies, and many stakeholders in crafting this bill."