

Why Should Head Start Programs Test Water for Lead?

Marco: I'm putting this slide. Some of you who have been involved in some of the other webinars that we've done have seen this particular slide, but just wanted to put it up there so that folks understand a little bit about some of the work that we've been doing and why we're doing it.

To start off is lead in water has always been important to the office. It's in our regulation. We always point to a jury monitoring that there is Head Start Performance Standard language related to making sure that our environments for our children are healthy and safe. Just wanted to point to the GAO report, which is the Government Accountability Office report that was released in 2020.

They did a study regarding child care facilities and the need to enhance monitoring and collaboration to help assure drinking water is safe in federal agencies, or programs run by federal agencies. One of the things that they found was that almost 76% of our Head Start programs that were part of the survey had not tested and/or did not know if they had tested the water as it relates to lead.

They gave us four recommendations as part of the report. I'm going to only speak to the first recommendation because I think it's one of the ones that a lot of folks have questions about. The first recommendation is the GAO asking us to require Head Start programs to document that water provided to children had been tested for lead.

Our response and one way that we were trying to ensure that this was taking place, it was decided that we were going to use the mechanism of monitoring in order to be able to do that and help to address the notion, or help to address the issue of us trying to figure out how programs are documenting and making sure that the water is being tested for lead. Other aspects of the response was that we were going to provide some more training or technical assistance, and trying to figure out ways to better support our programs and testing the water for lead. Next slide, please.

Just wanted to point as part of the mechanism that we were using, we looked at our monitoring protocol. We had a similar question in the protocol last year, this is the new question for FY23, for the focus area 2. It's slightly different than what we had before. As you can see, the PM4, the question that we have is that the grant recipient has implemented a process for monitoring and maintaining health and safe environments.

Then the question specific to lead in water is question number 3, which is that the grant recipient will demonstrate how children are not exposed to lead in their facilities, including exposure to lead and paint and lead in water. Next slide, please.

Based on the question, even though it's different now than what we had last go around, one of the things that was found when programs were being reviewed was that they did not test water for lead and we're unaware of this requirement. And they did not test water for lead and we're unaware of this requirement because the state child care licensing did not require it.

Just want to let everybody know whether it's being required by state licensing or not, our programs have to test for lead in water as part of the requirement in order to meet the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Next slide, please. One of the questions that we get after programs find that there is lead in water, what to do about it, or how to address it as it relates to funding.

There's two aspects of funding. Programs can use their Head Start funds to deal with the lead in water issue depending on what it is. And they can request one-time program improvement funds. All funding, whether it's program improvement or regular annual funds have the same limitations as long as at the cost are allowable under the Head Start Act.

We do see some programs who are able to look at their budget and figure out how to plan to do the work within their operating budget, within their annual funds. And if you are not able to do that, you can always request for the one-time funds. In order to do the request, or if you have any questions regarding how to do a program improvement request, please reach out to your regional office with questions related to how to do that and what you need to do in order to request these type of funds.