



Get the lead out New York

Why New York State's efforts to get lead out of school drinking water are still inadequate



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September 2026

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Dr. Steve Goldstein, Chair of Chapter 2's Committee on Environmental Health and Climate Change for the NY State American Academy of Pediatrics and others for their review of this document, as well as for their insights and suggestions. Thanks also to Elizabeth Ridlington, Nilou Yaar and Leonardo Pelizzari-Astle of Frontier Group for their research and editorial support; and Holly Myers for proofreading.

The authors bear responsibility for any factual errors. The recommendations are those of Environment America Research & Policy Center. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of our funders or those who provided review.

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Executive summary

LEAD IS A POWERFUL NEUROTOXIN that is especially harmful to children.¹ The science is clear that there is no known safe level of exposure to lead.² The presence of even small amounts of lead in children's blood has been associated with behavioral problems, slowed growth and learning difficulties, among other health problems.³

New York's schools have a responsibility to keep children safe while learning, including by providing them with safe drinking water. Yet, water supplies in schools across New York State regularly test positive for lead contamination, despite several attempts by policymakers in recent years to address the issue.

According to the most recent testing results posted to the New York State Department of Health's website, 42% of New York State's public schools had at least one water outlet used for drinking or cooking that tested above the state's standard of 5 parts per billion (ppb) of lead. That's over 12,000 water outlets across the Empire State that tests indicate could be exposing schoolchildren to lead.

In all likelihood, these test results are just the tip of the toxic iceberg. Schools are not required to report positive lead tests *below* 5 ppb to the state website – despite the consensus of public health experts that lead can be harmful to human health even at low levels of exposure.⁴ In addition, our analysis shows concerning trends of some schools reporting that lead remediation is “complete” only to report exceedances of the state standard in the tests taken years later.

New York's current “test and fix” approach to lead contamination is inadequate. **New York should shift to requiring filters on all drinking water taps in schools and adopt a tighter (1 ppb) standard for lead in school drinking water.**

The drinking water in too many New York State schools contains lead.

According to data supplied to the New York State Department of Health by 4,514 public schools and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) locations:

- 1,918 schools (42%) reported at least one water outlet at which lead levels exceeded 5 ppb in the most recent complete testing data reported by schools to the Department of Health;
- 12,452 water outlets at New York State public schools tested above the state's 5 ppb threshold for lead;
- Detailed testing data provided by schools indicate that many other water outlets across the state have tested positive for lead at levels *below* 5 parts per billion, which still poses risks to children. Tests at 5 ppb or below are not required to be reported to the state Department of Health database and schools are not required to take remedial action to reduce lead risks at these outlets.⁵

- These figures include only the *most recent* testing results reported by schools to the state. Other outlets tested above the state's threshold in the past but have reportedly either been removed from service or remediated.

all five counties, 15% or more of outlets – more than one in every seven outlets potentially used for drinking or cooking – tested above the threshold. (See Figure ES-1 below.)

Lead in school drinking water is a statewide problem.

- Jefferson, St. Lawrence, Chautauqua, Lewis and Tompkins counties had the highest percentage of schools with at least one outlet testing at more than 5 parts per billion of lead. In all five counties, 75% or more of schools tested had at least one outlet exceeding the state threshold.
- Seneca, Chautauqua, Cortland, Franklin and Jefferson counties had the highest percentage of outlets testing above the 5 ppb state threshold. In

New York State's current lead protection efforts are inadequate.

- Lead testing is notoriously variable, meaning that taps testing below a given threshold at one moment may test above the threshold at a later time (and vice versa).⁶ Testing below the threshold, therefore, is not necessarily an indicator of successful and lasting lead remediation. Coupled with the state's inadequately protective 5 ppb standard, variability in lead testing puts children at risk of drinking lead-contaminated water and provides a false sense of security for families.

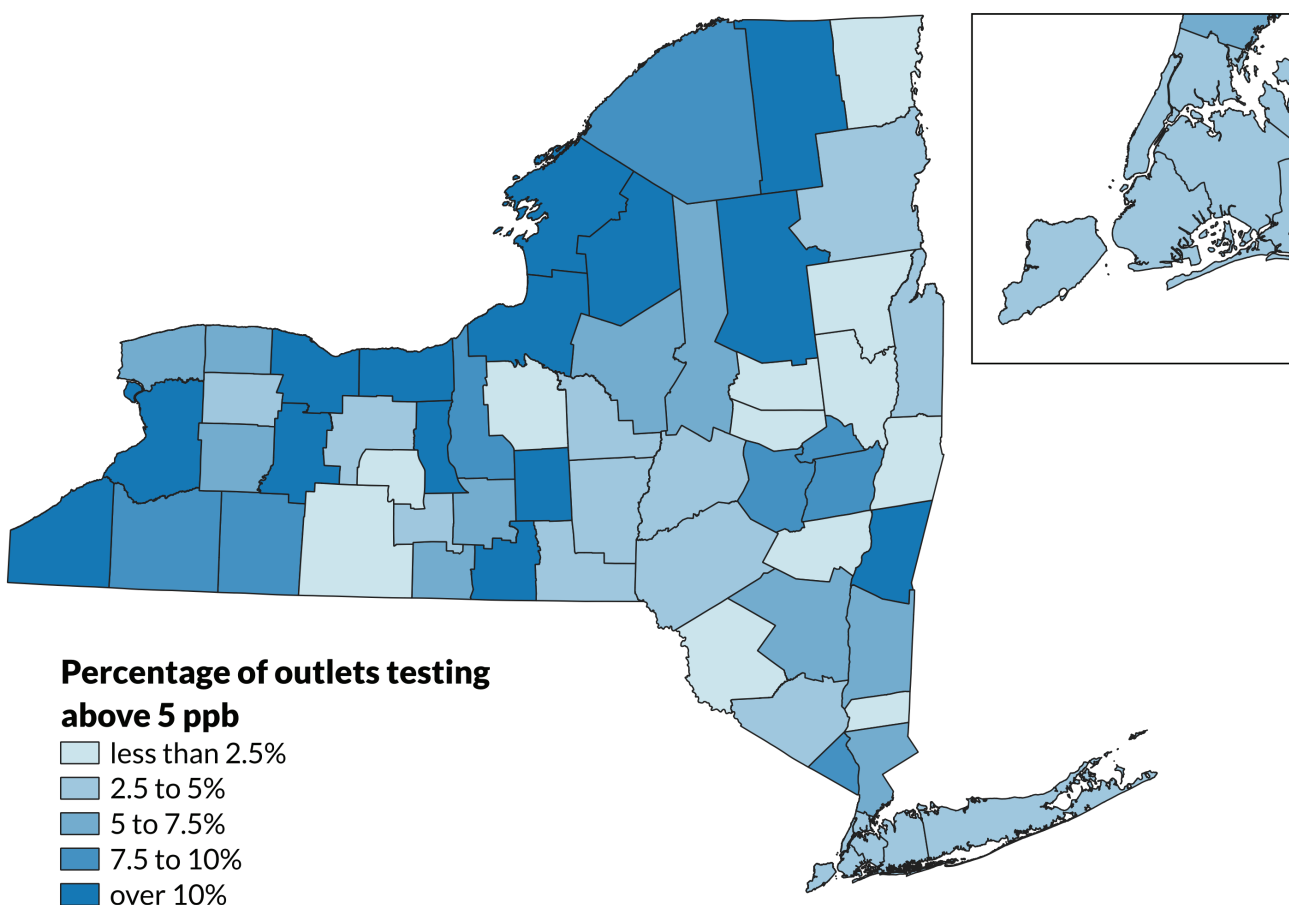


Figure ES-1. Percentage of outlets at public schools testing above the state's 5 ppb threshold

- Of the 525 schools reporting testing results for the ongoing 2026-2028 compliance period (as of July 13, 2026), 312 (59%) reported *more* taps exceeding the state’s lead threshold than in the schools’ final reporting for the 2023-2025 compliance period. All but eight of these schools were located in the New York City school district, which has reported the most test results to the state thus far in 2026. This raises the possibility that children have continued to be exposed to water with lead levels above the state threshold even after the schools reported that remediation of lead hazards was “complete.”
- New York State does not require remediation for water outlets that test positive for lead below the 5 ppb threshold. In some schools, these outlets pose a significant risk of lead exposure – in one Erie County elementary school, for example, initial testing in 2024 found that 40% of outlets at the school tested above 5 ppb for lead, but another 40% of outlets tested positive for lead at concentrations between 1 and 5 ppb.⁷ Only the former outlets are required to be remediated under state law.
- A 2025 New York State Comptroller’s report identified problems with earlier rounds of lead testing at public schools, including the failure to test many outlets that should have been tested, the absence of required remediation plans at some school districts, and failure to report testing results as required. The report did not address whether these problems had carried over into subsequent rounds of lead testing.⁸

- Data reported to the New York State Department of Health lead testing database are not always accurate and can create a confusing picture of how schools are acting to protect children’s health. Improvements in reporting for the 2026-2028 compliance period should address some of these concerns.

New York State should shift away from its current “text and fix” approach, which fails to adequately protect schoolchildren from lead. Instead, the state should adopt a preventive “filter first” strategy that limits exposure to lead at all taps in every school.

State policymakers should replace the state’s current testing protocol and 5 ppb standard with a “filter first” requirement that requires the installation and maintenance of lead-capturing filters on all taps used for drinking, cooking and beverage preparation and a 1 ppb post-filtration limit on lead consistent with public health recommendations. Since stand-alone fountains do not support point-of-use filters, fountains should either be disconnected or replaced by lead-filtering water bottle stations, which can also include fountains as needed.

In the meantime, local school districts should go above and beyond current state requirements by adopting “filter first” plans and ensuring that the drinking water provided to children at school does not exceed 1 ppb of lead.

Lead in school drinking water puts children at risk

LEAD IS A POWERFUL neurotoxin and is especially harmful to children.⁹ Research suggests that young children absorb as much as five times more lead into their bodies than adults from any given source.¹⁰ Since they are still developing, children are more vulnerable to lead contamination than adults, leading to behavioral and learning problems and a range of other impacts.¹¹

Experts agree that there is no safe level of exposure to lead.¹² Even tiny blood-lead concentrations in children have been associated with behavioral problems, slowed growth and learning difficulties.¹³ The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that even at these low levels, lead exposure in children can lead to nervous system damage, learning disabilities, hearing problems and impaired blood cell formation and function, among other impacts.¹⁴ The EPA has for this reason set a maximum contaminant level goal (MCLG) of 0 ppb for lead in drinking water.¹⁵

Lead accumulates in the body with each exposure, magnifying the health risks over time.¹⁶ Even if a child drinks from a lead-contaminated water source only periodically, any neurological harm that results may be long-lasting. A 2012 study in Wisconsin found that fourth graders who had “moderate” levels of lead exposure before age 3 scored “significantly lower” on reading and math tests than those who did not.¹⁷ Another study, published in 2022, found that childhood lead exposure is responsible for the loss of 2.6 IQ points in every American alive. That’s around 824 million IQ points lost nationwide due to lead exposure.¹⁸

Because lead has been phased out of products such as paint and gasoline, tap water is now a relatively larger source of lead exposure.¹⁹ Students in the U.S. spend more than 15,600 hours at school over the course of their K-12 education, meaning lead contamination in water at school can be a significant source of exposure.²⁰

Lead exposure in children can lead to nervous system damage, learning disabilities, hearing problems and impaired blood cell formation and function, among other impacts.

The water in many New York State schools continues to expose children to unsafe levels of lead

IN 2016, NEW YORK was the first state in the nation to pass legislation requiring schools to test their drinking water for the presence of lead.²¹ The law was intended to meet an urgent public health need: As of 2017-18, as many as 17,000 New York State children under six years old had actionable levels of lead in their blood, more than in any other state.²²

The law not only required schools to test for lead, but it also required them to follow standard testing procedures, disclose exceedances of lead standards publicly, and take action to remove outlets testing above the state threshold for lead from service and conduct remediation.

In the decade since that legislation was adopted, New York has lowered its state standard for lead in school drinking water from 15 parts per billion to 5 parts per billion and undertaken three full rounds of lead testing.²³ Many schools have undertaken some form or another of lead remediation.

Yet, widespread exposure of children to lead in school drinking water remains. New York's efforts to reduce lead exposure have been built around the notion that testing could reliably indicate lead levels in water. Science shows that premise is false. Because the amount of lead present in water varies over time due to factors including water chemistry and water use patterns, a test that fails to detect lead at one time is no guarantee that a similar test will not detect lead during subsequent testing.²⁴

As a result, the water from thousands of faucets, drinking fountains and other water outlets at New York state schools continues to contain lead at levels that put children at risk.

New York has taken action but lead threats remain

In 2016, New York adopted legislation requiring public schools and BOCES locations (facilities that provide educational services to students from multiple school districts, such as vocational, technical and adult education) to test all outlets providing potable drinking water for lead, to remove outlets from service that exceed the state's lead contamination threshold, to provide alternative sources of drinking water, and to notify parents and public officials of the results.²⁵ Initial testing identified that 82 percent of New York schools had at least one outlet that exceeded the 15 ppb threshold.²⁶ An early 2017 report by the New York State Department of Health found that approximately 9% of outlets that had thus far been tested in New York City, and 14% of outlets tested in the remainder of New York State, were above the 15 ppb threshold.²⁷

The 2016 law required a second round of testing in 2020, but this was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was to have been completed by 2021.²⁸ In that round of testing, roughly 4% of outlets tested exceeded the 15 ppb threshold.²⁹ However, as revealed by the New York State Comptroller in 2025, some districts did not test all the taps they were required

by law to test. In a survey of 21 school districts, the comptroller found that 29% of outlets were either not tested or were not locked or otherwise adequately secured against use as sources of drinking water.³⁰

Moreover, while the drop in the number of outlets testing positive for lead indicated progress in efforts to protect children from lead exposure, the Comptroller's report noted that only slightly more than half of all outlets testing positive for lead at the 21 surveyed districts during the state's second round of lead testing (in 2020-2021) had been properly remediated.³¹

In 2021, New York lawmakers took further steps to protect schoolchildren from exposure to lead, with passage of a new law, which took effect in 2022, that reduced the lead "action level" to 5 ppb, required testing every three years as opposed to every five, and required school districts to post full testing results (including results for outlets testing below the 5 ppb threshold) on the school's website.³² Reporting under the revised state law occurs during three-year compliance periods, the first of which ran from 2023 through 2025.

In addition to the testing and remediation requirements, New York State provides full reimbursement for expenses schools undertake to remediate lead contamination. However, this funding is limited only to remediation of outlets that tested above the state's 5 ppb threshold during the current compliance period.³³

Several revisions to the program have been implemented for the 2026 to 2028 compliance period; most notably, charter schools are now required to comply with the law.³⁴

New York State's efforts to test school drinking water for lead and require remediation have improved the level of transparency around school lead exposure and driven many schools to take action to reduce the risk to children. But as the data to follow demonstrate, these actions have been insufficient to protect New York's children from exposure to lead in school drinking water.

Testing shows continued problems with lead contamination in New York State schools

Ten years after New York first took action to address lead in school drinking water, there are still more than 12,000 water outlets in public schools that exceed the state's 5 ppb standard for lead in drinking water. And there are likely many more fountains and taps that expose children to lead at levels below the state standard that still pose risks to their health.

The data in this analysis are based on two rounds of lead testing in New York State schools: testing completed during the now-concluded 2023-2025 compliance period, and testing completed and reported to the state thus far in the 2026-2028 compliance period. All data for the analysis were downloaded from the New York State Department of Health, which collects data submitted by schools. In some cases, we consulted detailed testing records provided by individual schools to correct obvious errors in the state-collected data. (See Methodology and Appendix B for details.)

The data presented here are *not* a comprehensive record of all lead testing that has taken place since 2023. Rather, the data for each compliance period in the New York State Department of Health database represent the *most recent* testing results for each school.

New York State provides full reimbursement for expenses schools undertake to remediate lead contamination. However, this funding is limited only to remediation of outlets that tested above the state's 5 ppb threshold during the current compliance period.

For example:

- Initial testing at a specific school might identify five outlets that exceed the 5 ppb threshold and the state database would indicate five exceedances;
- The school then removes three of those outlets from service, implements remediation at the other two, retests those two outlets and neither exceeds the 5 ppb threshold;
- The school revises the data it reports to the state of New York to indicate that zero outlets now exceed the threshold.

Guidance materials from the New York State Department of Health indicate that reporting “is designed to be updated when new information like new sampling results are received and/or after remediation is complete,” and that “as remedial actions are taken, the number of outlets reported above the action level should decrease.”³⁵

For the limited number of New York State schools that have already completed their testing for the 2026-2028 compliance period, the results included in this analysis reflect that testing. For all other schools

– including those that report incomplete results for the 2026-2028 compliance period – testing results from the 2023-2025 compliance period are used.

42% of schools had at least one outlet that violated New York’s lead standards

Of the 4,514 schools reporting lead testing data since the beginning of the 2023-2025 compliance period, 1,918 – or 42% – reported at least one outlet at which lead levels exceeded the 5 ppb state threshold. Sixteen schools – mostly BOCES facilities or schools with just a few tested outlets – reported that 100% of the outlets they tested exceeded the 5 ppb threshold.

In total, 12,452 out of 221,078 outlets tested above the state’s 5 ppb threshold for lead in the most recent testing reported to the state Department of Health.

Jefferson, St. Lawrence, Chautauqua, Lewis and Tompkins counties had the highest percentage of schools with at least one outlet testing above 5 parts per billion. In all five counties, 75% or more of schools tested had at least one outlet exceeding the state threshold. (See Table 1 and Figure 1 below. For data for all counties, see Appendix A.)

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS WITH AT LEAST ONE OUTLET TESTING ABOVE 5 PPB, TOP 10 COUNTIES

County	Schools w/at least one outlet >5 ppb	Total number of schools	% of schools with at least one outlet >5 ppb
Jefferson	33	39	84.6%
St. Lawrence	33	41	80.5%
Chautauqua	50	63	79.4%
Lewis	11	14	78.6%
Tompkins	12	16	75.0%
Orleans	10	14	71.4%
Erie	142	202	70.3%
Monroe	102	146	69.9%
Franklin	14	21	66.7%
Tioga	12	18	66.7%

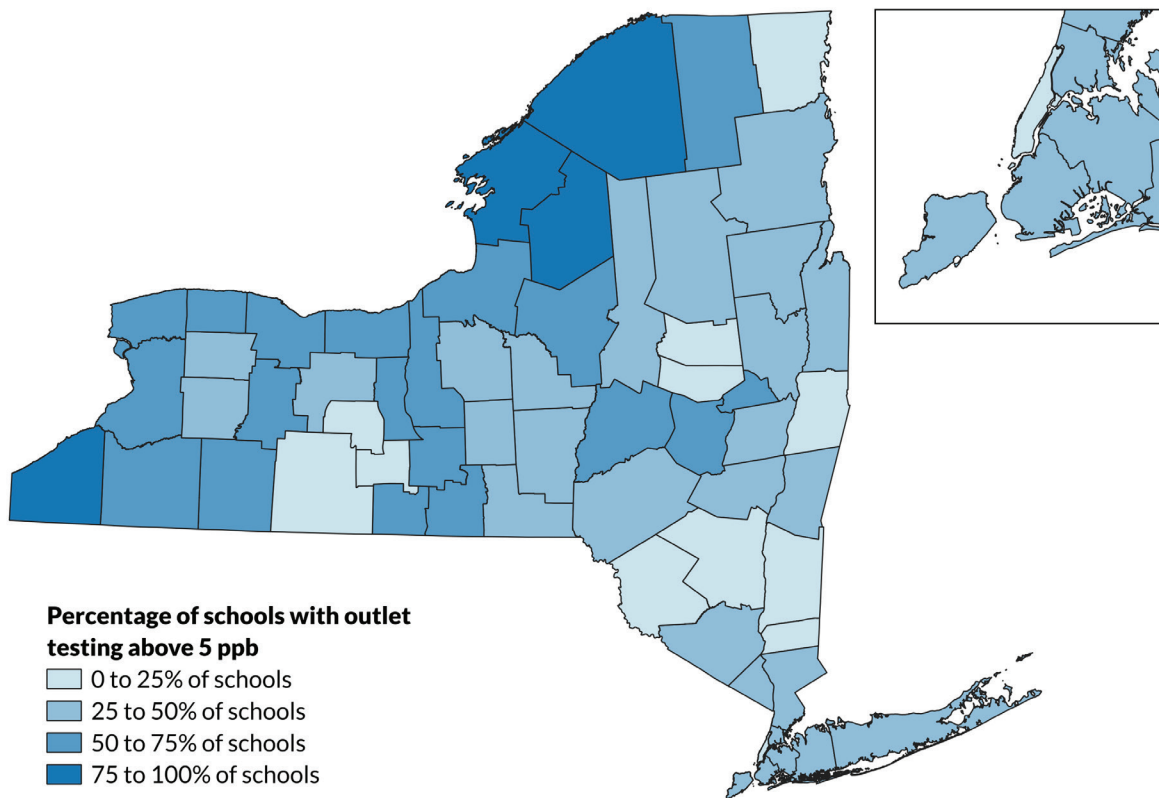


Figure 1. Percentage of schools with at least one outlet testing above 5 ppb

Seneca, Chautauqua, Cortland, Franklin and Jefferson counties had the highest percentage of outlets testing above the 5 ppb state threshold. In all five counties, 15% or more of outlets – more than one in every seven outlets potentially used for drinking or cooking – tested above the threshold.

The number of outlets with lead in the water is significantly higher than the number of outlets exceeding the 5 ppb threshold. As described below (see “New York’s lead standards are insufficient to protect children’s health,” page 15, detailed testing data provided by individual school districts often reveals a significant number of taps with levels of lead between 1 and 5 ppb. These results are not included in reporting to the state Department of Health.

Compiling all the detailed testing results for all schools in New York is beyond the scope of this report, but it is likely that the number of outlets testing positive for lead, but below the 5 ppb threshold, ranks in the hundreds,

if not thousands. Data from an earlier round of lead testing in Erie County, for example, identified more than 700 taps that tested positive for lead at concentrations between 4 and 5 ppb.⁸⁸

Data from elsewhere in the country illustrate the potential scale of the omission. Testing conducted in Michigan between 2020 and 2022, for example, found

Ten years after New York first took action to address lead in school drinking water, there are still more than 12,000 water outlets in public schools that exceed the state’s 5 ppb standard for lead in drinking water.

lead at levels above 5 ppb in 71% of facilities sampled, but detectable levels of lead in 89% of all facilities – nearly an additional 20% of schools where students

would have been exposed to lead but would not have been reflected in reporting data, had the reporting rules in place in New York State been applied.³⁶

TABLE 2. TOP 10 COUNTIES FOR PERCENTAGE OF OUTLETS TESTING ABOVE 5 PPB, TOP 10 COUNTIES

County	Outlets testing less than or equal to 5 ppb (most recent)	Outlets testing over 5 ppb (most recent)	Outlets with testing results (most recent)	% of outlets testing >5 ppb
Seneca	193	50	243	20.6%
Chautauqua	2,524	616	3,140	19.6%
Cortland	565	114	679	16.8%
Franklin	811	153	964	15.9%
Jefferson	1,735	309	2,044	15.1%
Columbia	725	127	852	14.9%
Hamilton	87	15	102	14.7%
Oswego	2,074	332	2,406	13.8%
Tioga	634	101	735	13.7%
Monroe	6,793	1,069	7,862	13.6%

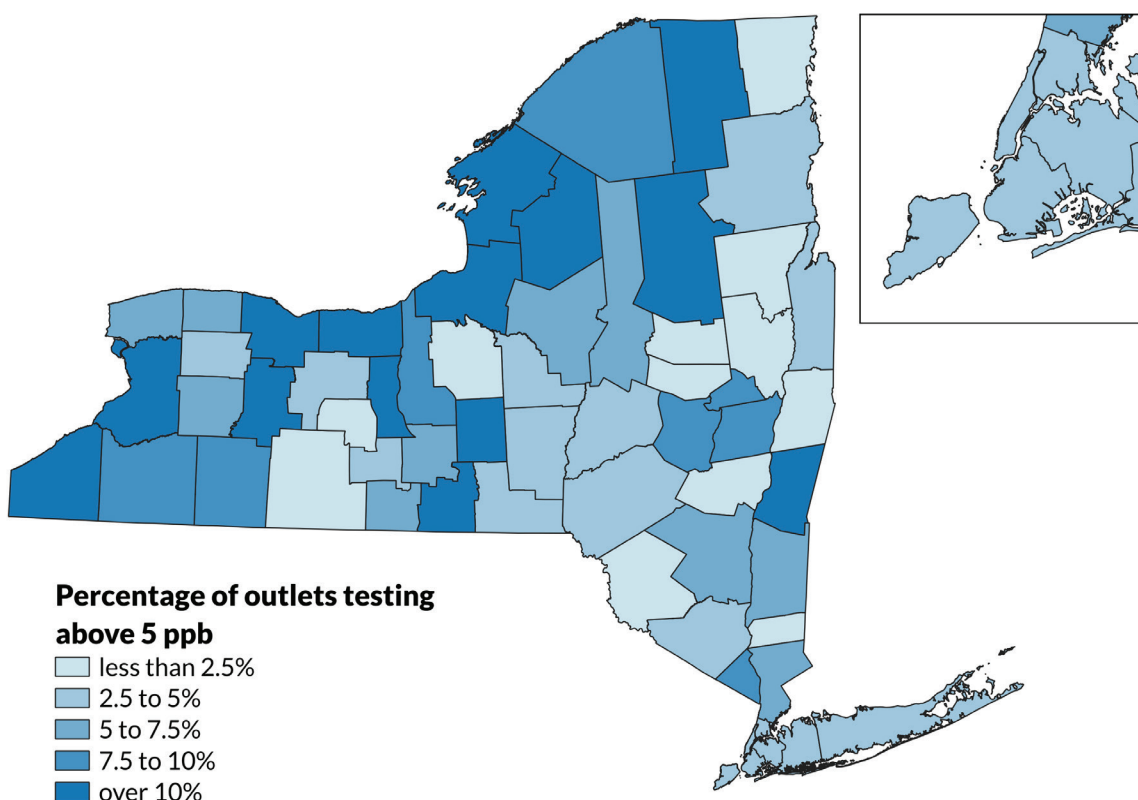


Figure 2. Percentage of outlets testing above 5 ppb

New York’s “test and fix” approach is inadequate

TEN YEARS AFTER New York’s adoption of mandatory lead testing for schools, more than four in 10 New York public schools have at least one outlet that exceeds state standards for lead in school drinking water. While that is an improvement over conditions a decade ago, too many New York children remain at risk.

New York, like many states, has taken an outdated “test and fix” approach to addressing lead in school drinking water – an approach that requires action only *after* high lead concentrations at specific outlets have been documented in testing. The nature of lead contamination makes “test and fix” an inadequate strategy to protect children, and early data from the 2026-2028 round of lead testing in New York schools demonstrates that it has not been sufficient to keep children safe.

Why testing for lead often produces varying results

Lead testing of school drinking water produces notoriously variable results. Lead is a moving contaminant – it is absorbed into the water from pipes and fixtures rather than being present in source water itself.³⁷ Lead contamination in a building’s water system at any given place and time is the result of a combination of several factors, including water chemistry, water use patterns and the presence of lead plumbing materials.³⁸ These characteristics mean that an outlet tested one week and found to show no signs of lead contamination might the following week show high levels of lead.³⁹ Research has shown that water from a given fountain or faucet can be “highly hazardous” even after multiple samples indicate that it is safe to drink.⁴⁰

Lead problems are recurring in school drinking water, even after “remediation”

There are numerous examples of New York State schools that have reported more outlets exceeding the state’s lead threshold so far in 2026 testing than were reported in the state’s final 2023-2025 testing data – including in schools where remediation of previously identified lead threats was reported as “complete.” **This is an indication that the “test and fix” approach in New York’s lead-in-school-drinking-water law has thus far failed to reliably identify – much less fix – all of the lead threats to children’s health.**

As of July 13, 2026, 525 schools had reported testing results for the ongoing 2026-2028 compliance period, with 512 schools reporting that their testing is complete. Of those 525 schools, 312 (59%) reported *more outlets* exceeding the state’s lead threshold than were included in their final reporting for the 2023-2025 compliance period. (All but eight of these schools were located in the New York City school district, which is responsible for the vast majority of 2026 testing results present in the Department of Health database.)

These testing results suggest that some lead problems that schools believed had been remediated – and told families and state officials had been addressed – were not actually fixed in a lasting way. On the other hand, some outlets that tested *below* the state threshold in previous testing may have unknowingly continued to expose students to lead based on the results of testing in 2026 that showed those outlets exceeding the threshold.

It is possible that some students may have been exposed to dangerous levels of lead for months or even years between the time remediation was said to be “complete” and when the latest round of testing found elevated levels of lead. Moreover, in some cases, outlets that *never* tested above the lead threshold during the 2023-2025 period *have* tested above the threshold in 2026 testing, potentially demonstrating the inherent variability of lead testing results.

Here are several examples of schools reporting more outlets exceeding the 5 ppb threshold in 2026 testing than in the 2023-2025 compliance period. In the first two of these cases, the New York State Department of Health website listed remediation as “complete” during the 2023-2025 period:

- Valley Stream Central High School in Nassau County conducted initial lead testing in September 2023.⁴¹ Nine outlets at the school tested above the 5 ppb state threshold. Five outlets (all in locker rooms) were labeled with signs warning not to consume the water; the other four outlets were removed from service pending retesting or fixture replacement. The New York Department of Health lead reporting database for the 2023-2025 compliance period (accessed in July 2026) reported that sampling and remediation had been completed and listed no outlets at the school testing above 5 ppb.

In 2026, however, a new round of testing identified eight outlets at the school exceeding the 5 ppb threshold, including several of the same taps with positive lead readings in the fall 2023 testing.⁴² For example, a counter outlet in the Culinary Arts room tested at 5 ppb in 2023 – not an exceedance of the state standard, since action is only required if tests *exceed* 5 ppb – but then retested at 220 ppb, 44 times the state standard, in June 2026.⁴³ Another outlet, in the school library office, tested at 8 ppb in September 2023, was retested at 5 ppb in October 2023, and tested at 9 ppb in June 2026. It has been removed from service pending remediation.

- At New York City Public School 100 in Queens, initial testing in June 2023 identified levels of lead in exceedance of the 5 ppb threshold at 29 of 93 outlets in the school.⁴⁴ Subsequent post-remediation testing in September 2023 identified only five taps in use for cooking or drinking that continued to exceed the threshold in first-draw sampling.⁴⁵ Two subsequent waves of testing in October 2023 found only two faucets continuing to exceed the standard – these were then reported to have been “permanently removed from service.” The New York State Department of Health lead reporting website for the 2023-2025 compliance period listed zero outlets over 5 ppb for the school and remediation as “complete.”

Testing conducted in April 2026, however, identified 13 of 89 samples exceeding the 5 ppb threshold, including one outlet in the kitchen testing at 378 ppb – nearly 76 times the state standard.⁴⁶

Several taps that tested above the 5 ppb threshold in 2023 also tested above the threshold in 2026. For example, a water bubbler near Room 218 at the school tested as follows:

- 12.8 ppb on June 6, 2023
- 4.02 ppb (below the state standard) on Sept. 9, 2023
- 7.9 ppb on April 25, 2026

A bubbler near room 231 tested as follows:

- 8.53 ppb on June 6, 2023
- 5.62 ppb on Sept. 9, 2023
- <1 ppb (below the state standard) on Oct. 4, 2023
- 7.47 ppb on April 25, 2026

- Hutchinson Elementary School in the Pelham Union Free School District in Westchester County reported three positive tests for lead in 2023 testing.⁴⁷ Unlike the two schools noted above, these three exceedances were included in the New York State Department of Health’s 2023-2025 reporting data and the school district reported its remediation as “not started.”

In 2026, the school reported four outlets – one more than in 2023 – as testing above 5 ppb lead.⁴⁸ These outlets did not appear to have exceeded lead standards when tested in 2023:

- Lead was not detected in the outlet at classroom 208 in 2023, but was found at a level of 6 ppb in 2026;
- Classroom 213 tested below the state threshold in 2023, but at 33 ppb in 2026;
- Classroom 206 tested below the state threshold in 2023, but at 23 ppb in 2026.⁴⁹

In short, lead testing thus far in the 2026 through 2028 compliance period shows a distressing number of cases in which outlets that did not test above the threshold for lead previously are now exceeding the threshold ... as well as cases when outlets that were supposed to have been “remediated” are again testing above the threshold for lead.

In some cases, an increase in the number of outlets testing above lead thresholds in the 2026-2028 compliance period may not represent a true increase in risk. This can happen if outlets that tested over the threshold during the 2023-2025 compliance period were removed from service or converted to hand wash-only sinks (and thereby remediated), but then were tested again in the 2026-2028 compliance period. Valley Stream Central High School, for example, reported outlets in boys’ and girls’ locker rooms exceeding the threshold in 2023-2025, remediated those outlets by posting a “hand wash only” sign, then retested the outlets in 2026, finding that they continued to exceed the threshold.⁵⁰

True remediation of lead in school drinking water does not mean falling below the state’s lead standard on a single test. It means removing the threat of lead contamination – **permanently**. New York’s “test and fix” approach to protecting children from lead exposure does not always lead to durable or adequate “fixes,” leading to the possibility that tests below the threshold convey a false sense of security to parents and children, despite the continued existence of lead threats.

New York’s lead standards are insufficient to protect children’s health

New York State’s approach to lead in school drinking water falls short in another respect: The standard set for lead concentrations in drinking water is inadequate to protect children’s health.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that “state and local governments should take steps to ensure that water fountains in schools do not exceed water lead concentrations of 1 ppb,” a concentration well below New York State’s action level.⁵¹

New York’s 5 ppb limit, therefore, allows children to drink or eat food prepared with water containing levels of lead that pose risks to their health. And because exceeding the 5 ppb threshold is the catalyst for required action to limit lead threats, schools’ reporting can convey to parents that all necessary action is being taken to protect students when that is not the case.

To return to the example of P.S. 100 in Queens: in 2026 testing, 13 of 89 tested outlets exceeded New York’s 5 ppb threshold. But 48 out of 89 outlets – well more than half – reported levels of lead exceeding 1 ppb, including 10 outlets testing between 3 and 5 ppb.⁵² (See Figure 3 page 16.)

Another example: Clarence Center Elementary School in Erie County is listed as having tested 82 outlets, with zero exceedances of state standards in the complete 2023-2025 reporting period data on the New York State Department of Health website, indicating that remediation is complete. In initial testing in June 2024, the school reported that 33 of the 82 outlets tested above the 5 ppb threshold, but

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of lead contamination –
permanently.

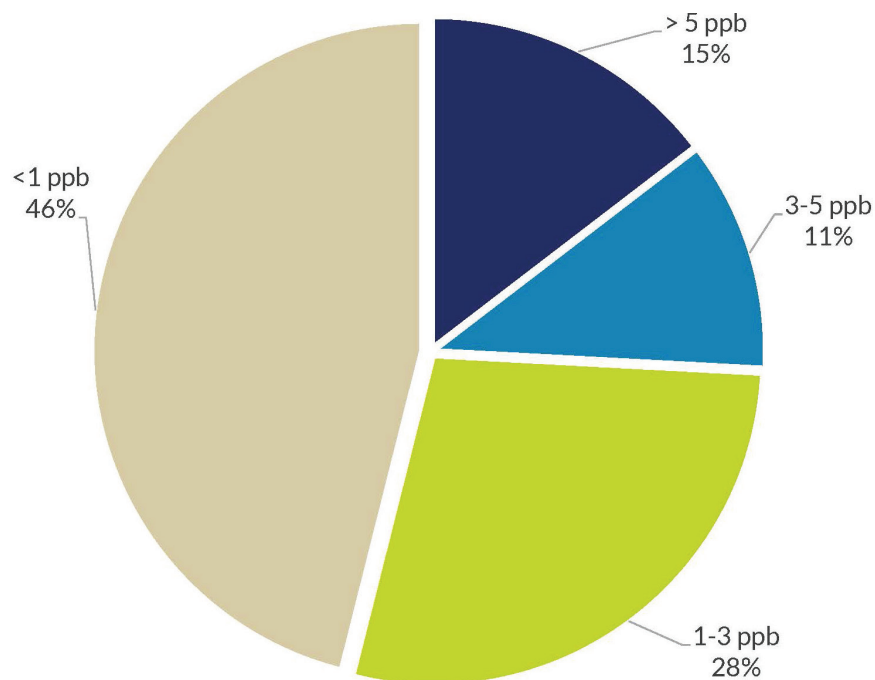


Figure 3. Lead testing results for P.S. 100 in Queens, May 2026⁵³

that another 33 tested above 1 ppb, meaning that 80% of all outlets at the school tested positive for lead at some concentration.⁵⁴ Remediation of the

40% of taps that tested positive for lead, but below the 5 ppb threshold, is not required by state law. (See Figure 4 below.)

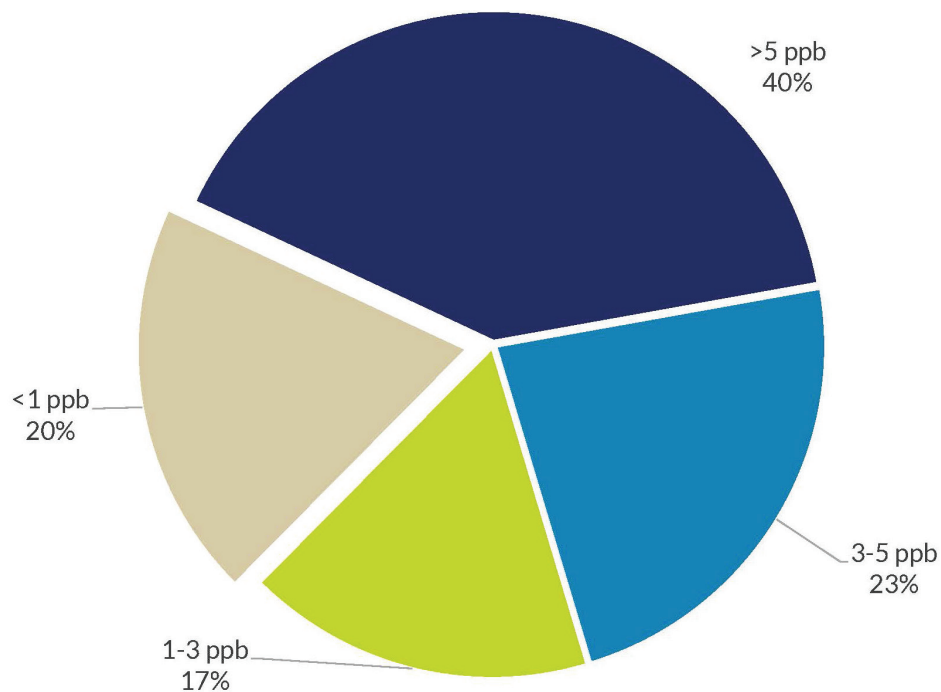


Figure 4. Lead testing results for Clarence Central Elementary School, June 2024⁵⁵

Schools should be required to remediate any outlet testing above 1 ppb for lead – and inform parents and the public of all test results above 1 ppb. But even with a tighter standard, there are better strategies to protect our children from exposure to lead in school drinking water than the failed “test and fix” approach. These are strategies that can be put in place immediately, without waiting for a testing result, and are proven to give reliable protection to students.

Lead testing reporting is confusing and incomplete

New York State residents deserve complete and accurate information with which to assess the state’s progress toward eliminating lead from school drinking water. The New York State Department of Health’s online database of lead testing results should provide this transparency and accountability. Unfortunately, gaps in reporting, as well as confusion on the part of some school districts, make the data less accurate and complete than they should be, though changes in reporting for the 2026-2028 compliance period address some of the problems.

First, numerous school districts appeared to be confused about how to report their results, or otherwise made data entry errors that were not flagged by the state’s reporting system. In our review of data from the 2023-2025 compliance cycle, we found several districts that reported testing results for more outlets than they reported required testing. We investigated these cases and corrected the data as described in the methodology and Appendix B, but it is possible that other reporting problems may affect the quality of the data.

Second, many schools completed their testing only late in 2025, meaning that any subsequent remediation that occurred after the end of the compliance period may not be captured in the data. The last update of the 2023-2025 compliance period data was reported to be on April 9, 2026, and reporting for the 2023-25 compliance period is now closed.⁵⁶ Because schools can no longer update 2023-25 results, the data may not reflect remediation of outlets that tested above 5 ppb that took place after the end of 2025.

Changes to reporting for the 2026-2028 compliance period will provide more clarity about how schools have responded to lead tests exceeding the threshold:

- Schools are now required to report the number of outlets that exceeded the 5 ppb threshold in initial testing separately from the number of outlets exceeding the threshold after post-remediation testing.⁵⁷
- Schools are also required to report the specific steps they have taken toward remediation.⁵⁸ Combined with reporting pre- and post-remediation exceedances, this will enable families and the public to keep track of schools’ progress in addressing lead problems in schools.
- Schools are now required to report the total number of outlets on school grounds, including those that are not required to be tested for lead because they are not used for drinking or cooking.⁵⁹ This will enable families and the public to track changes in schools’ testing protocols.

New York must require filters on all drinking water outlets

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continue to be exposed to lead in drinking water at their schools. New York State's existing "test and fix" approach is not up to the task of eliminating the risk of lead exposure from our schools once and for all – it is too reliant on unreliable testing, takes too long to yield results, and spends resources on testing that could be devoted instead to implementing proven fixes in more schools.

New York State should move toward a “filter first” policy that prioritizes getting effective tools for reducing lead exposure into more of our schools more quickly, rather than waiting for a positive test result to act.

State policymakers should replace the state's current testing protocol and 5 ppb standard with a “filter first” requirement that requires the installation and maintenance of lead-capturing filters on all taps used for drinking, cooking and beverage preparation, along with a 1 ppb post-filtration limit on lead consistent with public health recommendations. Since stand-alone fountains do not support point-of-use filters, fountains should either be disconnected or replaced by lead-filtering water bottle stations, which can also include fountains as needed.

New York would not be the first state to adopt a “filter first” policy. In 2023, the state of Michigan became the first to require installation of water stations with filters certified to remove lead.⁶⁰ The legislation requires that filters be properly maintained, with annual water sampling to confirm the effectiveness of the filters.⁶¹ A wide variety of manufacturers offer filtration options certified to NSF/ANSI Standard 53 for lead reduction,

which, along with a parallel standard for particulate reduction, is required for compliance with Michigan regulations.⁶² A 2023 study found that filters certified to these standards are 99% effective in reducing lead to below the applicable certification threshold in field testing.⁶³ Taking a similar approach in New York State would ensure that more children enjoy effective protection against lead contamination without having to depend on the results of highly variable lead testing.

While lead filters are currently only certified for reducing lead concentrations to below 5 ppb, filtration often delivers water with less than 1 ppb of lead – a level consistent with public health recommendations. A 2019 study of filters meeting appropriate NSF/ANSI standards in Flint, Mich., found that more than 97% of filtered samples contained lead at levels below 0.5 ppb.⁶⁴ In addition, testing of filtered drinking water stations installed as part of a pilot program in Portland, Ore., found that lead levels at those stations averaged below 1 ppb.⁶⁵ Establishing a 1 ppb post-filtration limit on lead would both set the state's lead reduction goal at the level necessary to protect public health and drive continued innovation and improvement in technology to protect children from lead.

In addition to requiring filtration, state policymakers should allocate sufficient funding to help schools install the necessary equipment and ensure that it is properly maintained.

In the meantime, local school districts should go above and beyond current state requirements by adopting “filter first” plans and ensuring that the drinking water provided to children at school does not exceed 1 ppb of lead.

Appendix A. Lead testing data for all counties

County	Outlets testing less than or equal to 5 ppb (most recent)	Outlets testing over 5 ppb (most recent)	Outlets with testing results (most recent)	Schools w/tests >5 ppb	Total number of schools	% of schools with at least one outlet >5 ppb	% of outlets testing >5 ppb
Albany	3,245	269	3,514	33	66	50.0%	7.7%
Allegany	879	90	969	8	13	61.5%	9.3%
Bronx	17,094	685	17,779	139	325	42.8%	3.9%
Broome	1,832	50	1,882	21	54	38.9%	2.7%
Cattaraugus	2,144	187	2,331	19	33	57.6%	8.0%
Cayuga	897	77	974	13	22	59.1%	7.9%
Chautauqua	2,524	616	3,140	50	63	79.4%	19.6%
Chemung	975	70	1,045	15	29	51.7%	6.7%
Chenango	1,292	52	1,344	5	18	27.8%	3.9%
Clinton	971	22	993	5	24	20.8%	2.2%
Columbia	725	127	852	7	15	46.7%	14.9%
Cortland	565	114	679	7	15	46.7%	16.8%
Delaware	719	19	738	7	17	41.2%	2.6%
Dutchess	1,957	139	2,096	16	67	23.9%	6.6%
Erie	12,567	1,494	14,061	142	202	70.3%	10.6%
Essex	258	11	269	5	13	38.5%	4.1%
Franklin	811	153	964	14	21	66.7%	15.9%
Fulton	851	5	856	2	20	10.0%	0.6%
Genesee	1,071	47	1,118	8	16	50.0%	4.2%
Greene	339	8	347	5	12	41.7%	2.3%
Hamilton	87	15	102	1	3	33.3%	14.7%
Herkimer	1,405	88	1,493	6	23	26.1%	5.9%
Jefferson	1,735	309	2,044	33	39	84.6%	15.1%
Kings	28,309	786	29,095	156	476	32.8%	2.7%

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County	Outlets testing less than or equal to 5 ppb (most recent)	Outlets testing over 5 ppb (most recent)	Outlets with testing results (most recent)	Schools w/tests >5 ppb	Total number of schools	% of schools with at least one outlet >5 ppb	% of outlets testing >5 ppb
Lewis	511	69	580	11	14	78.6%	11.9%
Livingston	1,017	123	1,140	12	19	63.2%	10.8%
Madison	1,052	51	1,103	9	27	33.3%	4.6%
Manhattan (New York County)	15,244	456	15,700	59	238	24.8%	2.9%
Monroe	6,793	1,069	7,862	102	146	69.9%	13.6%
Montgomery	386	5	391	2	16	12.5%	1.3%
Nassau	10,695	512	11,207	110	326	33.7%	4.6%
Niagara	3,439	223	3,662	32	52	61.5%	6.1%
Oneida	2,764	217	2,981	33	65	50.8%	7.3%
Onondaga	6,268	162	6,430	33	121	27.3%	2.5%
Ontario	2,494	103	2,597	14	33	42.4%	4.0%
Orange	3,055	152	3,207	32	88	36.4%	4.7%
Orleans	1,168	89	1,257	10	14	71.4%	7.1%
Oswego	2,074	332	2,406	25	43	58.1%	13.8%
Otsego	413	21	434	8	14	57.1%	4.8%
Putnam	564	7	571	2	17	11.8%	1.2%
Queens	25,523	1,006	26,529	195	416	46.9%	3.8%
Rensselaer	1,621	11	1,632	4	40	10.0%	0.7%
Richmond	6,006	178	6,184	39	114	34.2%	2.9%
Rockland	1,419	118	1,537	35	82	42.7%	7.7%
Saratoga	1,993	41	2,034	17	56	30.4%	2.0%
Schenectady	1,576	151	1,727	28	45	62.2%	8.7%
Schoharie	524	51	575	6	10	60.0%	8.9%
Schuyler	175	5	180	1	6	16.7%	2.8%
Seneca	193	50	243	6	11	54.5%	20.6%
St. Lawrence	1,600	170	1,770	33	41	80.5%	9.6%
Steuben	1,634	36	1,670	11	58	19.0%	2.2%
Suffolk	10,619	519	11,138	129	358	36.0%	4.7%

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County	Outlets testing less than or equal to 5 ppb (most recent)	Outlets testing over 5 ppb (most recent)	Outlets with testing results (most recent)	Schools w/tests >5 ppb	Total number of schools	% of schools with at least one outlet >5 ppb	% of outlets testing >5 ppb
Sullivan	1,013	21	1,034	5	28	17.9%	2.0%
Tioga	634	101	735	12	18	66.7%	13.7%
Tompkins	490	36	526	12	16	75.0%	6.8%
Ulster	834	68	902	9	37	24.3%	7.5%
Warren	761	19	780	6	20	30.0%	2.4%
Washington	829	29	858	7	21	33.3%	3.4%
Wayne	1,643	230	1,873	24	38	63.2%	12.3%
Westchester	7,311	555	7,866	125	266	47.0%	7.1%
Wyoming	591	33	624	3	10	30.0%	5.3%
Yates	448	0	448	0	4	0.0%	0.0%

Appendix B. Revised testing results for individual schools

As noted in the methodology, we manually reviewed instances in which schools reported testing results for a greater number of outlets than required testing, as well as schools reporting “NA” or blank results for elements of their 2023-2025 compliance period reporting. For each of these schools, we consulted the detailed testing data on school websites and replaced the results originally reported to the New York State Department of Health with the following values. (Other schools reporting “NA” or blank results were confirmed to have zero results in that category and are not listed below.)

School	School district	Endnote	County	BEDS code	Outlets that require sample	Original: Outlets testing <= 5 ppb	Original: Outlets testing >5 ppb	Revised: Outlets testing <=5 ppb	Revised: Outlets testing >5ppb
Wellsville Secondary School	Wellsville Central School District	66	Allegany	022601060004	165	141	247	141	24
Binghamton HS	Binghamton City School District	67	Broome	030200010021	40	40	NA	41	1
Horace Mann School	Binghamton City School District	68	Broome	030200010022	12	12	NA	11	1
Woodrow Wilson School	Binghamton City School District	69	Broome	030200010014	16	7	NA	15	1
PS 92 New Build Community School	Buffalo City Schools	70	Erie	140600010312	74	56	27	51	16
PS 206 South Park High School	Buffalo City Schools	71	Erie	140600010110	140	104	41	96	20

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School	School district	Endnote	County	BEDS code	Outlets that require sample	Original: Outlets testing <= 5 ppb	Original: Outlets testing >5 ppb	Revised: Outlets testing <=5 ppb	Revised: Outlets testing >5ppb
PS 30 Frank A Sedita Academy	Buffalo City Schools	72	Erie	140600010130	80	69	14	63	12
PS 95 Waterfront Elementary School	Buffalo City Schools	73	Erie	140600010119	203	198	8	186	8
PS 45 International School	Buffalo City Schools	74	Erie	140600010045	144	135	11	126	2
PS 89 Lydia T. Wright School	Buffalo City Schools	75	Erie	140600010094	126	107	21	95	11
PS 355 The Buffalo School Of Culinary Arts & Hospitality Mgmt	Buffalo City Schools	76	Erie	140600010313	110	108	3	99	2
Boonville Elementary School	Adirondack Cent Sch-Boonville	77	Oneida	410401060004	30	82	2	28	0
Adirondack MS/HS	Adirondack Cent Sch-Boonville	78	Oneida	410401060005	37	82	2	35	3
Naples Elem School	Naples Central School	79	Ontario	431201040003	82	82	13	77	3
Gardner Dickinson School	Wynantskill Union Free School	80	Rensselaer	490804020002	29	22	29	25	0

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School	School district	Endnote	County	BEDS code	Outlets that require sample	Original: Outlets testing <= 5 ppb	Original: Outlets testing >5 ppb	Revised: Outlets testing <=5 ppb	Revised: Outlets testing >5ppb
Gilboa Conesville Central School	Gilboa Conesville Cent Sch	81	Schoharie	540801040001	10	105	0	10	0
South Seneca Elem School	South Seneca Central School	82	Seneca	560501040003	22	33	27	11	11
South Seneca Middle High School	South Seneca Central School	83	Seneca	560501040004	25	44	1	23	2
Dryden Elementary School	Dryden Central School	84	Tompkins	610301060001	31	70	0	31	0
Rubin A Cirillo High School	Gananda Central School	85	Wayne	650902040001	59	140	15	55	4
Edenwald School	Mount Pleasant-Cottage U F S	86	Westchester	660804020003	34	34	11	28	0

Methodology

THIS ANALYSIS IS BASED on lead testing results for drinking water at public schools and BOCES facilities as reported to the New York State Department of Health, downloaded on July 13, 2026. The data reflects testing results from two compliance periods, 2023-2025 (https://health.data.ny.gov/Health/Lead-Testing-in-School-Drinking-Water-Sampling-and-rygk-rhum/about_data) and 2026-2028 (https://health.data.ny.gov/Health/Lead-Testing-in-School-Drinking-Water-Sampling-Inf/g9uy-32jy/about_data).

The New York State Department of Health reports that these data are “self-reported by the schools into a NYS Department of Health electronic survey and transferred to Health Data NY as is without edits or redaction. Schools update their information on an ongoing basis as their water sampling is performed, laboratory test results are received, and remediation is conducted (as needed).”⁸⁷

For both compliance periods, the testing results in the New York State Department of Health database are intended to reflect the *most recent* testing results, including tests that were taken after remediation of previous positive test results took place. As a result, a school with an outlet that tested above the state’s 5 parts per billion (ppb) threshold in an initial test, but below the threshold in a subsequent, post-remediation test, would only be required to report the second result.

Most New York State schools have not begun reporting testing results for the 2026-2028 compliance period. For those that have reported complete testing results in 2026, this analysis reflects those results (not

those from the earlier 2023-2025 compliance period). For schools that have not yet reported testing results in 2026, or for those that indicated that their testing thus far is incomplete, the earlier 2023-25 compliance period results are used in this analysis.

School names/locations/descriptions are based on 2023 to 2025 reporting. Testing results for the 2023-2025 and 2026-2028 compliance periods were joined based on each school’s Basic Education Data System (BEDS) identification code. For schools reporting 2026-2028 compliance data, “current number of outlets over 5 ppb” was treated as equivalent to the “number of outlets over 5 ppb” measure in the 2023-2025 dataset (as opposed to “total number of outlets over 5 ppb”).

The following data cleaning steps were taken prior to performing the analysis:

- Two duplicate records from the 2023-2025 compliance period were deleted.
- There were 39 schools in the 2023-2025 compliance period dataset for which the number of outlets with test results exceeded the number of outlets that the schools reported required testing. For each of these schools, we reviewed the detailed lead testing results posted to the schools’ websites. In cases of clear and significant errors or discrepancies with the original data – such as obvious typos, data entry errors and duplicative reporting of testing results – we adjusted the school-reported figures in the New York State database to match, to the best of our judgment, the data reported on the individual schools’ websites. In cases where the difference between the detailed

lead testing data and the data reported on the state website was marginal, or where the correct figure was unclear, we deferred to the schools' original reporting. We made changes to 18 schools' reporting, specifically:

- Wellsville Secondary School, Allegany County
- Rubin A. Cirillo High School, Wayne County
- Gilboa Conesville Central School, Schoharie County
- Boonville Elementary School, Oneida County
- Adirondack Middle School/High School, Oneida County
- Dryden Elementary School, Tompkins County
- South Seneca Elementary School, Seneca County
- Gardner Dickinson School, Rensselaer County
- South Seneca Middle/High School, Seneca County
- Naples Elementary School, Ontario County
- Edenwald School, Westchester County
- PS 92 New Build Community School (Buffalo), Erie County
- PS 206 South Park High School (Buffalo), Erie County
- PS 30 Frank A. Sedita Academy (Buffalo), Erie County
- PS 95 Waterfront Elementary School (Buffalo), Erie County
- PS 45 International School (Buffalo), Erie County
- PS 89 Lydia T. Wright School (Buffalo), Erie County
- PS 355 The Buffalo School of Culinary Arts & Hospitality Management, Erie County

Amended results for these schools can be found in Appendix B.

A further 10 schools reported either “NA” or blank results for part of their 2023-2025 test result data. The data for these schools were also compared with the full testing data on the school websites. For all but three schools, the correct value was zero. For three schools, we determined, based on reporting results posted on the schools' websites, that there had been one positive (over 5 ppb) test in each school. The three schools are:

- Binghamton High School, Broome County
- Horace Mann School, Broome County
- Woodrow Wilson School, Broome County

County totals are based on the county location of the school district housing each school. In a few cases, the location of a specific school facility may be in a different county than the county reported in these results.

The percentage of outlets testing above 5 ppb is based on the share of all outlets for which testing results were reported to New York State, not the number of outlets reported by the schools as requiring testing.

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