

Lead in school water: Portland officials didn't warn teachers, students of known contamination



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Portland Superintendent Carole Smith apologized Friday for allowing students and teachers at two schools to continue to drink tainted water after tests showed unsafe levels of lead.

Portland Public Schools spokeswoman Christine Miles told The Oregonian/OregonLive on Thursday that school employees "immediately" cut off access to water from drinking fountains and sinks at Rose City Park and Creston schools **when water samples turned up unacceptably high levels of lead.**

But Smith acknowledged Friday that workers did not turn off water from fixtures shown to be emitting lead or warn students, employees and visitors not to drink it. Instead, they took steps to repair and replace plumbing but allowed the tainted water to flow as usual in the meantime.

At Rose City Park, that meant students were free to drink lead-laced water for eight school days after district officials knew about the toxic results.

"Portland Public Schools regrets not having notified families and staff as soon as the tests indicated that there were elevated levels of lead," Smith wrote in an email to all families. The federal Environmental Protection Agency's "best practices indicate that once elevated levels of lead are found, those water faucets should not be used for drinking or food preparation until they are replaced and retested. We apologize for not following this protocol."

Lead is a known neurotoxin that is particularly harmful to young children.

Portland Public Schools hasn't systematically tested drinking water in its schools since 2001. Officials plan to test every fountain and faucet in all the schools this summer.

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LEAD IN PPS WATER

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