

# Flint Water Crisis Overshadows Giant Public Health Triumph



By Hank Campbell — January 23, 2016

*Lost in the political infighting tied to the Flint, Michigan water crisis is that lead levels in kids and adults are far, far lower than they have ever been. To that point, a report from a national newspaper highlights that, "after years of progress, context-free panic over events in Flint is counterproductive."*



Courtesy:

[womenshealthmag.com](http://womenshealthmag.com)

The lead in water in Flint, Michigan quickly went from a public health issue to a political one, and scorn predictably came down along party lines. The Obama administration's Environmental Protection Agency offered up a sacrificial lamb, while Democratic voters called for Republican governor Rick Snyder to resign. The health of children can always become political theater in an election year.

As [Dr. Gil Ross, the American Council on Science and Health Senior Director of Medicine and Public Health, noted in his timeline of the events](#) <sup>[1]</sup>, the problems being lamented now were first discussed in 2011, and from then on, with meaningless solutions offered by bureaucrats claiming environmental expertise, such as "boil the water," which, of course, does not remove lead.

Lost in all of the political gamesmanship is that in Michigan, the water is 245 percent safer than it was just 10 years ago. The Council has been talking about lead for decades, and did careful examinations of each change in the guidelines, and we all agree there is no way to know what level of lead is truly safe, so it's better not to have any. But [as Dave Mastio at USA Today notes](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, 8,000 kids in Flint have not had their lives destroyed, no matter who is hiring lawyers for the class-action lawsuit.

No lead is wanted, but using the health of kids as political pawns to advance an ideological or financial agenda is not just unethical, it is reprehensible. The reality, Mastio notes, is that in the late 1970s, 88 percent of Americans ages 1 to 5 had at least 10 micrograms per deciliter of lead in their blood. *That's twice what is listed today as a level of concern.* Fifteen years later it was down to 4.4 percent, and it's dropped every year since.

We can discuss what went wrong in Flint, in the state and at the EPA. But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that, when it comes to lead, we've enjoyed one of the greatest public health triumphs in U.S. history.

"After years of progress, context-free panic over events in Flint is counterproductive," Mastio writes. "It feeds the cynical idea that government always fails." And he's correct. Oddly, environmental groups and other fans of bigger government will use this crisis to lobby for more government, while glossing over the fact that one child in Flint showed a dangerous level of lead.

Data from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention show that over 300 people had a dangerous lead level in Michigan in 2005.

One is not good, certainly if it's your child, but it's a lot better than 300. Hyperbole and exaggeration are not helping anyone, they just make the public lose trust in media reports about science and health.

Read more: [Flint lead crisis getting a tad overdone](#) <sup>[2]</sup>by David Mastio, USA TODAY

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**Links**

[1] <http://acsh.org/2016/01/the-flint-water-crisis-timeline-plenty-of-blame-to-go-around/>

[2] <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2016/01/22/flint-water-lead-poison-michigan-health-column/79019134/?source=acsh.org>