



**Georgia Dept  
of Early Care  
and Learning**  
BRIGHT FROM THE START

**Brian P. Kemp**  
Governor

**Amy M. Jacobs**  
Commissioner

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Georgia Child Care Programs Are Now Eligible to Enroll in the  
Clean Water for Georgia Kids Program**

*GA Department of Education and RTI International Partnering with DECAL on Federal Grant to Train, Test, and Take Action to Eliminate Lead in Drinking and Cooking Water*

**ATLANTA, Ga., (February 18, 2022)** – The Clean Water for Georgia Kids Program, a partnership between the Georgia Department of Education, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), and RTI International, a nonprofit research institute, is now ready to help both schools and child care centers test, communicate, and provide low-cost recommendations on how to remove lead from drinking and cooking water across Georgia. The testing program is free with funding from a United States Environmental Protection Agency Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) grant. DECAL works with child care providers, school systems, and child advocacy organizations to ensure that Georgia’s children receive high quality child care and early learning experiences in safe and healthy environments.

“As the department of state government responsible for helping child care facilities in Georgia provide safe, healthy, and nurturing care for all of Georgia’s young learners,” said Rhonda Parker, Child Care Services Director of Field Operations at DECAL, “this program will help ensure that the water used in child care facilities is safe and free from lead.”

Childhood exposure to lead causes lifelong and irreversible cognitive and behavioral deficits. Lead can get into water from pipes or fixtures containing lead, particularly if the water is corrosive, or if the water sits for a long time in the pipe or fixture. Currently, schools and child care centers within the public water supply are not required to, and thus are usually not tested for lead at the tap.

“With the Clean Water for Georgia Kids Program, our mission is to eliminate childhood exposure to lead in water where Georgia’s children learn and play using our convenient, science-based approach to identify and fix lead at the tap,” said Jennifer Hoponick Redmon, a senior environmental health scientist and the RTI program director.

After water samples are collected and shipped back to RTI's Analytical Sciences Laboratory with a prepaid mailing label, they are tested for lead. The program aims to test every drinking and cooking tap at up to 500 Georgia child care locations this year with the support of center staff. In North Carolina, the sister Clean Water for Carolina Kids program has so far tested more than 4,000 centers. Testing revealed lead at or above 15 parts per billion in at least one tap at 8.8% of facilities.

Participants receive their results along with clear recommendations. Often, no-cost and low-cost solutions are effective at reducing exposure to lead, such as practicing clean water habits (e.g., using cold water for drinking or cooking), designating lead-free taps for consumption, flushing water after periods of inactivity, installing water filters certified to remove lead, and replacing old faucet fixtures.

**HOW DO I ENROLL?** Enrollment opens on February 18, 2022, and will continue through the year for the initial funding. To enroll, please register for one of the pre-enrollment webinars at this [link](#) ( or paste <https://bit.ly/3hW66kN> into your web browser). The webinar will detail 1) how to enroll, 2) how to sample, and 3) how to ship your samples back. At the end of the webinar, you will receive the enrollment code to register your center at [www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/Georgia](http://www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/Georgia). Up to 800 Georgia public schools and 500 Georgia child care learning centers/family child care learning homes can enroll in the program this year. We are especially interested in enrolling child care centers and elementary schools, schools that have a higher percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch, and schools in underserved communities.

## **About DECAL**

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. We administer the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licensed child care centers and home-based child care, Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, federal nutrition programs, and manage the Quality Rated, Georgia's community powered child care rating system. The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information on DECAL, go to <https://www.decal.ga.gov>.

## **About the RTI Clean Water for US Kids Program**

As a nonprofit, RTI's approach is science-based, unbiased, and convenient. Our multidisciplinary team focuses on laboratory analysis, environmental health, web programming, community engagement, and risk communication. The Georgia program is building off the efforts of the Clean Water for Carolina Kids pilot study and subsequent program in North Carolina. The program team trains and engages school and center staff as citizen scientists to collect water samples using a mail-out water quality test kit and provides support along with an online portal for enrollment, communication, tracking, and reporting. A critical part of the program is personalized training and communication, including webinars, how-to videos, a FAQ page, a standardized communication platform, and a results mapper. Our program is the recipient of Harvard University's Roy Award for Environmental Partnership due "the significance in solving an important problem, our innovation, and potential for scalability and transferability to other environmental problems or geographic regions." We also received a 2020 Environmental Business Journal Award for project merit based on "significant innovation and solutions to addressing drinking water quality concerns." For more information about our Clean Water for US Kids program, go to [www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/georgia](http://www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/georgia). For more information about RTI, go to [www.rti.org](http://www.rti.org).

## About GaDOE

Led by State School Superintendent Richard Woods, the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) is the state agency serving Georgia's K-12 public school districts, schools, and students. "As part of our efforts to ensure every child has a safe place to learn, we are pleased to launch this project enabling lead testing in schools across Georgia," State School Superintendent Richard Woods said. "These results will allow local and state leaders to take action to provide safer learning environments for students."

GaDOE's strategic plan emphasizes transforming the agency into one that provides meaningful support to schools and districts, with an emphasis on child-focused, classroom-centered education policy. GaDOE staff work to ensure that the 1.7 million students in Georgia's public schools receive a holistic education that focuses on the whole child, and graduate ready to learn, ready to live, and ready to lead. Learn more at [gadoe.org](http://gadoe.org) and [gadoe.org/reimaginek12](http://gadoe.org/reimaginek12).

**QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?** Contact us at [www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/Georgia/contact](http://www.cleanwaterforUSkids.org/Georgia/contact) or 1 (855) 997-3183 and a program team member will text, email, or call you back based on your preference.