



Australian Government
Department of Health

FACT SHEET: revised enHealth Guidance Statements on per-and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide a guide to a technical science based document known as the 'enHealth Guidance Statement on PFAS'.

enHealth Guidance Statements are developed for state and territory public health units, to help them assess public health risks when PFAS have been released into the environment. The guidance statements on PFAS were first issued in 2016. The statements were revised in 2019 to reflect the most current evidence relating to PFAS.

What has changed in the 2019 statements?

The 2019 statements offer more detail about the types of effects on the human body that *may* be associated with PFAS exposure. For example, latest evidence suggests PFAS exposure has been associated with mildly elevated levels of cholesterol, effects on kidney function and effects on the levels of some hormones. However, these effects are small — generally within ranges seen in the general population. PFAS has not been shown to cause disease in humans.

Importantly, the 2019 statements reinforce the advice to avoid exposure to PFAS. While exposure to PFAS probably has minimal impact on human health, as a precaution, people living in PFAS contaminated areas should minimise their exposure to PFAS until more evidence is gathered on possible health effects.

What is the health advice?

Some people who live or work in areas that have been contaminated with PFAS, might have been exposed to higher levels of PFAS through food or drinking water. They are advised to minimise their exposure until there is more known about possible impacts on health.

State and territory governments can provide localised advice on how to minimise exposure to PFAS. For further information, please visit www.pfas.gov.au.

What is a reference value?

Reference values are used by scientists to determine the acceptance level of chemical or substances in your diet. One way to express these values is through a Tolerable Daily Intake, often referred to as a (TDI). The TDI's for PFAS are important because the major routes of exposure in communities are through contaminated drinking water and contaminated food. The TDI for PFAS is used specifically for conducting assessments (including, human health risk assessments) at contaminated sites.

What is the advice for pregnant/breastfeeding women?

There is no evidence that PFAS is a major contributor to poor health outcomes in pregnant women or their babies. However, as a precaution, pregnant women should minimise their exposure to PFAS.

Breastfeeding has significant benefits for infants. These benefits far outweigh any potential health risks from PFAS that may be transferred to infants through breast milk. Mothers living in PFAS-contaminated areas should continue to breastfeed.

Should I have a blood test for PFAS?

Because we do not yet know whether PFAS causes adverse health effects, blood tests measuring levels of PFAS tests cannot say whether a person will become sick as a result of the PFAS in their body, or whether a current medical condition is the result of PFAS exposure.

Blood tests that have been conducted on groups of people in the PFAS Investigation Areas surrounding Williamstown, Oakey and Katherine are being used to inform research into the potential health effects of PFAS exposure. The blood testing program for this research will be closing on 30 June 2019.

What is being done to find out more about PFAS?

The Australian Government is aware of community concerns about exposure to PFAS and is monitoring and supporting scientific research into potential health impacts. The Government established an Expert Health Panel to provide advice on the potential health impacts associated with PFAS exposure and to identify priority areas for further research. The 2019 enHealth Guidance Statements on PFAS take into account the Expert Panel's Final Report.

There has also been a Parliamentary Inquiry into the management of PFAS contamination in an around Australian Defence Force bases and feedback from that inquiry has also informed the revised statements.

The Australian National University has been funded by the Department of Health to conduct an Epidemiological Study into the potential health effects of PFAS exposure, which is expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

What is PFAS?

PFAS stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. These are a class of chemicals that have been used since the 1950s to make products that resist heat, stains, grease and water. PFAS have been manufactured and used in a variety of industries around the globe. Products that might contain PFAS include furniture, carpets, and fabrics treated for stain and water resistance, foams used for firefighting, food containers, make-up and personal care products, and cleaning products.

What is enHealth?

Environmental health addresses all the physical, chemical and biological factors that can potentially affect a person's health.

The Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) includes representatives from the Australian Government, state and territory health departments, the New Zealand Ministry of Health and the National Health and Medical Research Council. Its role is to collaborate with Australian Government, and state/territory agencies, departments and organisations to provide national advice on environmental health matters. One way it shares this advice is by publishing enHealth Guidance Statements.

Where can I get more information?

For further information please visit:

www.pfas.gov.au — this site offers links to state and territory government advice on managing PFAS exposure, as well as information on national PFAS investigation and management programs.

www.health.gov.au/pfas

www.defence.gov.au/pfas

www.airservicesaustralia.com