

DHHS Anticipated Public Question Responses

June 15, 2022

How do I know if my drinking water contains PFAS?

Unfortunately, we know that PFAS contamination is present throughout North Carolina but we don't yet have comprehensive data for PFAS in water supplies across the state. Without testing there is no way to know if PFAS are present in your drinking water, but there are options available to get your water tested.

The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, or NC DEQ, has a consent order in place that requires Chemours to test private wells for PFAS if they are located within a certain distance to the Chemours facility near Fayetteville or the Lower Cape Fear River. If this could apply to you, contact NCDEQ at (910) 678-1101 for those located near the Chemours facility (Bladen, Cumberland, Robeson, Sampson) or (910) 678-1100 for those in the lower Cape Fear (Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover, and Pender counties).

For those that fall outside these two eligible areas you can take the following actions depending on your water source:

- Public Utility - If you receive your drinking water from a utility, you can reach out to your water provider to inquire about any PFAS testing they may have conducted.
- Private Well - If you receive your water from a private well, you can review the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Service's PFAS Testing and Treatment Factsheet to find a lab that can test your well.

PFAS (PFOA, PFOS, GenX, PFBS) has been detected in my water. Is it safe to drink?

Generally, the lower the levels, the lower the risk. Which PFAS were detected in your results?

For GenX and PFBS:

A) If above health advisory levels: The levels of GenX/PFBS in your water would increase the risk of health effects based on the EPA health advisory levels for these compounds.

B) If below health advisory levels: The levels of GenX/PFBS in your well water are not expected to increase the risk of health effects associated with these compounds.

For PFOA and PFOS:

The new EPA health advisory levels for PFOA and PFOS are below levels that can be detected with current tests. Therefore, any detection of either PFOA or PFOS in drinking water could represent an increased health risk.

What health effects should I be worried about?

Based on the EPA's review of the science, exposures to these four PFAS (PFOA, PFOS, GenX, PFBS) above the EPA health advisory levels can

- decreased liver function
- decreased immune response and reduced vaccine effectiveness
- decreased birthweight, behavioral changes of infants and children
- increased risk of high blood pressure for pregnant women
- increased cholesterol levels
- increased risk of kidney and/or testicular cancer.

If you are concerned about specific issues with your health, talk with your health care provider.

Information for health care providers is available from [NCDHHS](#) and from the CDC's [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry](#).

How can I be exposed to PFAS?

PFAS can be found in the environment near facilities where they are made or in areas where products containing PFAS are often used. PFAS may be found in contaminated drinking water, food, indoor dust, some consumer products, and workplaces. Most exposures occur through consuming contaminated food or water. Only a small amount of PFAS can get into your body through your skin, so very little PFAS exposure occurs during swimming, bathing, or showering in water contaminated with PFAS. Although some types of PFAS are no longer used, many products such as food packaging, firefighting foam and stain resistant treatments still contain PFAS.

What can I do to reduce my exposures to PFAS?

It is difficult to fully prevent PFAS exposure because PFAS are present at low levels in some foods and in the environment. However, there are steps you can take to reduce your PFAS exposure.

- If you live near known sources of PFAS contamination or your drinking water contains PFAS above the EPA health advisory levels, you may want to use a different water source or filter your water before drinking, cooking, and preparing infant formula.
- NC DHHS has developed a [PFAS testing and treatment factsheet](#). This factsheet provides information on available treatment systems that have been shown to reduce PFAS concentrations in drinking water.
- Reduce your use of products containing PFAS (packaged foods, products with non-stick or stain resistant coatings, and some personal care products). If you have questions about the products you use in your home, contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission at (800) 638-2772.
- Boiling water will NOT remove PFAS.

PFAS (PFOA, PFOS, GenX, PFBS) has been detected in my water supply, can I shower, bathe, wash clothes/dishes, water my plants, etc.?

Yes. Based on the current science, only a small amount of PFAS gets into your body through skin, so little PFAS exposure would come from showering, bathing, and similar activities.

Typical follow-up: What about brushing my teeth?

- The amount of water ingested while brushing teeth is minimal relative to amount of water typically consumed through eating and drinking. Exposures from brushing teeth would present a minimal health risk.

Can I use my water to mix my babies' formula?

For GenX and PFBS: The health advisory levels were calculated for the most sensitive populations, e.g., infants. If the GenX or PFBS is below the advisory level, then it is not expected to increase risk of health effects and can be used.

For PFOA and PFOS: The new EPA health advisory levels for PFOA and PFOS are below levels that can be detected with current tests. Therefore, any detection of either PFOA or PFOS in drinking water could represent an increased health risk and we would recommend using an alternate source or filtered water.

What is the difference between an interim and final health advisory level?

According to the EPA, the agency issues an interim health advisory when a contaminant's associated health effects assessment is in draft form, but there is a pressing need to provide information to public health officials prior to finalization of the health effects assessment. The PFOA and PFOS interim health advisories are intended to be in place during the time interval between initial understanding of health effects and publication of the final health advisory, maximum contaminant level goal (MCLG), and/or maximum contaminant level (MCL). Final health advisories are based on final health effects assessments.

Will EPA release an enforceable regulation for GenX in drinking water?

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, EPA has the authority to set enforceable National Primary Drinking Water Regulations for drinking water contaminants and require monitoring of public water systems. According to the [EPA PFAS Strategic Roadmap](#), the agency plans to establish a national primary drinking water regulation for PFOA and PFOS that would set enforceable limits and require monitoring of public water supplies, while evaluating additional PFAS and groups of PFAS. The EPA Science Advisory Board consultation is ongoing; with a proposed rule expected in fall 2022 and a final rule expected in fall 2023.

Is there one location where PFAS studies are summarized?

There are many ongoing PFAS health studies in North Carolina and across the country. Although we don't currently have one location for summarizing PFAS studies, NCDHHS continues to engage with researchers at the forefront of PFAS research to evaluate new health and toxicity information as it becomes available and update our public health guidance when needed. Ongoing studies include:

- [PFAS Testing Network](#) efforts to better understand the extent of exposure from drinking water across our state
- [GenX Exposure Study](#) at North Carolina State University
- [PFAS UNITEDD](#) multi-university project headed by the Colorado School of Mines
- [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry \(ATSDR\) Exposure Assessments and Multi-Site Health Studies](#)

If residents have additional health related questions, feel free to direct them to the DHHS Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch at 919-707-5900.