

Health FAQs

Will an alternative water supply be provided to affected people?

Bottled water will be available to households whose drinking water source is a bore that is being tested for PFOS and PFOA concentrations until such time that the bore water is known to meet the Ministry of Health's interim drinking-water guideline values for PFOS and PFOA. This approach is a precautionary health measure and not based on a known health risk.

If PFOS and PFOA compounds are suspected in the water I am drinking what should I do?

While you are waiting for test results for drinking water sourced from bores in the area identified by Defence as potentially affected, as a precaution use the bottled water that has been made available. This advice applies to water used for drinking, food preparation, cooking, brushing teeth or any activity that results in ingestion of water.

Is it safe to swim and shower in potentially affected water?

Yes. The risks to health come from the ingestion of PFOS and PFOA compounds. Any water ingested in any activities not listed above would be minimal.

What health support will be provided if the results show levels of PFOS and PFOA above guidelines in the water?

The form of health support will depend on what the tests results show. If residents are concerned about their health now, they should seek advice from their GP.

What is meant by “no acute health risk”?

No acute health risk means that exposure to PFOS and/or PFOA will not pose any significant health effects today. Our approach is a pre-cautionary one because we know these compounds accumulate in the body but we don't fully understand the effects this could have on human health in the long-term; therefore limiting any further exposure is the best course of action for reducing any long-term health risk.

Are there any health effects linked to PFOS and PFOA compounds in humans?

The potential effects of exposure to PFOS and PFOA to human health continue to be studied. These studies involve laboratory animal studies, as well as occupationally exposed workers, residents in communities with higher exposure and studies of the general population in the USA and other countries.

Adverse health effects have been demonstrated in animals exposed to much higher levels of PFOS and PFOA than are known to occur in people. Changes in the liver, thyroid, and pancreatic function, and some changes in hormone levels have been reported. However, the results of these animal studies and their relevance to humans are not always clear.

Potential adverse health effects in humans cannot be excluded but further research is needed to understand whether the adverse effects seen in animals have any implications for human health.

How can I be exposed to PFOS and PFOA compounds?

PFOS and PFOA are found in the blood of people and animals all over the world and are present at low levels in a variety of food products and in the environment (air, water, soil, etc.). Therefore, completely preventing exposure to PFOS and PFOA is unlikely, and no effective recommendations can be made for reducing individual exposures in the general population.

A variety of consumer products such as surface-protective coatings on clothing, carpets, and paper packaging have contained different types of PFAS in the past. Recent efforts to remove PFAS in many

of these products have reduced the likelihood of PFOS and PFOA exposure. In addition, research has suggested that exposure from consumer products is usually low.

Could my existing health problems be caused by PFOS and PFOA exposure?

If you are unwell for any reason see your doctor.

Are there future health problems which may occur because of PFOS and PFOA exposure?

There is no conclusive evidence that PFOS and PFOA exposure will result in future health problems. The evidence of health effects is not clear, and some effects may not be clinically significant. Talk to Healthline on 0800 611 116 about your concerns.

Should I get my blood tested? Will affected residents be given free blood tests or other support?

Tests for measuring levels in people are not routinely available. Individual blood testing is not recommended. The results only indicate if you have been exposed to PFOS and PFOA, but everyone will have had some exposure. It cannot tell you if you will develop health effects because of the exposure.

How will exposure to PFOS and PFOA compounds affect my pregnancy?

There is no consistent evidence of effects in pregnancy. For specific advice talk to your doctor.

Should I continue to breastfeed?

Yes. While some PFOS and PFOA compounds have been detected in breast milk overseas, the proven health benefits associated with breastfeeding outweigh any potential health risk to an infant from the transfer of PFOS and PFOA compounds through breast milk. For specific advice talk to your doctor.

How long does it take for PFOS and PFOA to leave my system?

In humans, studies suggest that the half-life (the time it takes for the amount to be reduced by half) of PFOS and PFOA compounds could range from two to nine years. The time it takes for PFOS and PFOA compounds to be excreted from the body is the same for adults and children.

The advice about health risks from PFOS and PFOA exposure is very uncertain. How do I deal with this?

Keep yourself informed and use the resources offered. If you have questions contact Healthline on 0800 611 116.

How will I know if the advice changes?

Government agencies will continue to assess the situation, undertake comprehensive health risk assessments and testing of water to update this advice.

What standards is the government applying?

In April 2017, the Australian Department of Health issued health based drinking guidance values for use in site investigations. This guideline was based on a report prepared by Food Standards Australia New Zealand, and NZDF's tests confirmed concentrations of PFOS and PFOA compounds above these guidelines. In November this year, the Ministry of Health accepted the Australian drinking water quality values for PFOS and PFOA as interim guidance levels, as neither New Zealand nor the World Health Organisation currently have set maximum acceptable values for these chemicals in drinking water.