

Frequently Asked Questions for Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)

PFAS are a group of man-made chemicals used for stain and waterproofing of consumer products. PFAS are also used in manufacturing processes and are found in certain fire-fighting foams. PFAS persist in the environment and may contaminate surface waters and groundwaters where they were made or used.

What are the most common ways people are exposed to PFAS?

The general population is exposed to low levels of PFAS in food packaging, water-repellent clothing, and textiles with stain-proofing technology. People who live in areas where PFAS was manufactured, used, or disposed may have greater exposures from consuming contaminated drinking water.

What are the possible health effects of exposure?

PFAS exposure may result in reduced vaccine effectiveness, increased cholesterol levels, changes in liver enzymes, developmental delays, low birth weights, high blood pressure during pregnancy, and cancer.

How can people find out if their water is contaminated?

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) has tested all community water supplies for PFAS. Results can be viewed online by searching for "[Illinois EPA PFAS dashboard](#)." Private wells have not been tested by Illinois EPA. Because PFAS can't be seen, tasted, or smelled, well owners near PFAS contaminated areas should consider testing their water. People can contact DPH.Tox@illinois.gov for help with finding a laboratory and interpreting results.

Is there an acceptable level of PFAS in drinking water?

IEPA and U.S. EPA health advisory levels for two PFAS chemicals, perfluorooctane sulfonate and perfluorooctanoic acid, are lower than the current laboratory detection limit of 2 ng/L. Thus, long-term exposure to any detectable level of PFAS in drinking water could affect the health of consumers.

How can people limit their exposure to PFAS in drinking water?

People can remove PFAS from water with faucet, refrigerator, or pitcher style carbon filters that can be purchased at home improvement stores. Filters should be certified by NSF/ANSI. Under sink reverse osmosis systems and more advanced whole-house treatment systems can also be installed.

Should residents with contaminated drinking water visit a health care provider?

People should speak to their doctor or child's pediatrician with any concerns they have. Because low levels of PFAS exposure can affect the immune system, adults and children should stay up to date on vaccinations. Other effects such as high cholesterol and blood pressure, changes in liver enzymes, and cancer may be monitored through routine checkups. A blood test for PFAS may help guide physicians in prioritizing specific wellness screenings and tests.

Where can people learn more about PFAS?

People wanting to learn more about PFAS in drinking water should consult IDPH's [PFAS in Drinking Water](#) fact sheet. For more information on PFAS sources, exposure routes, and actions being taken at the state and federal level, visit IEPA's [Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances](#) fact sheet.