

Talking to Your Doctor about Exposure to PFAS



If you have been exposed to perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and are concerned about your health, you can tell your doctor.

You can share this fact sheet with your doctor to help start a conversation about how PFAS can affect your health.

1. Can exposure to PFAS cause health problems?

- Some scientific studies suggest that certain PFAS may affect different systems in the body. NCEH/ATSDR is working with various partners to better understand how exposure to PFAS might affect people's health—especially how exposure to PFAS in water and food may be harmful.
- Some (but not all) PFAS build up in the body. The levels of some PFAS go down slowly over time once exposure stops. Scientists are studying how different amounts of PFAS in the body over time may affect health.
- More research is needed, but some studies in people have shown that certain PFAS may:
 - » affect growth, learning, and behavior of infants and older children
 - » lower a woman's chance of getting pregnant
 - » interfere with the body's natural hormones
 - » increase cholesterol levels
 - » affect the immune system
 - » increase the risk of cancer

If you have any of these conditions and have been exposed to PFAS, you can tell your doctor.

2. Should my family and I be tested for any of the health conditions possibly linked to PFAS exposure?

- Laboratory test results can't tell you if PFAS exposure has caused your health condition.
- Some of the health effects possibly linked to PFAS exposure, like high cholesterol, can be checked as part of your annual physical. It is important to have regular check-ups and screenings.
- You can tell your doctor about any exposure to PFAS and any symptoms you have.

3. Should my family and I get a blood test for PFAS if we have been exposed to PFAS?

- PFAS blood test results can tell you the amount of PFAS in your blood. However, test results won't tell you how PFAS will affect your health now or in the future.
- Blood testing for PFAS is not a regular test offered by doctors or health departments.
- If you want or need to know your PFAS blood levels, you can talk to
 - » your doctor or health care provider
 - » other health professionals (for example, for concerns about babies and children contact your regional Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit or PEHSU: <http://www.pehsu.net/findhelp.html>).
- **Remember** that test results will only tell you and your health care provider if you have been exposed to PFAS.
- Keep in mind that most people in the United States have one or more specific PFAS in their blood, especially PFOS and PFOA.

4. Could exposure to PFAS in drinking water harm my health in the future?

We don't know if exposure to PFAS may cause health problems in the future. You can tell your doctor if you have been exposed to PFAS and ask if you need to be monitored for symptoms or conditions that may be caused by PFAS exposure (see list in question #1) in the future.

5. How will exposure to PFAS in drinking water affect my pregnancy?

Exposure to PFAS in drinking water at levels above the EPA Lifetime Health Advisory has been associated with pregnancy-induced high blood pressure. This complication can include not only high blood pressure, but also signs of damage to other organ systems, most often the liver and kidneys.

Tell your doctor if you have been exposed to PFAS so that he/she can provide appropriate medical care. Checking for high blood pressure should be part of your routine prenatal care. It is important to go to all of your prenatal checkups and discuss with the doctor or nurse any health concerns.

6. Can I breastfeed my baby if I've been exposed to PFAS in drinking water?

Nursing mothers should continue to breastfeed.

- While we do not know a lot about the health effects of exposure to PFAS in breast milk, we do know that the benefits of breastfeeding are well documented.
- PFAS in a mother's body can move from her blood into her unborn child and from her breastmilk into her breastfed baby. However, based on current science, the benefits of breastfeeding appear to outweigh the risks for infants exposed to PFAS in breast milk.
- Breastfeeding is good for the health of both infants and mothers.
- Scientists continue to do research in this area.
- If you have concerns, talk to your doctor.
- For more information about the benefits of breastfeeding, please visit: <https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-benefits.html>.

7. How can I learn more about PFAS?

- Contact **1-800-CDC-INFO** for updated information on PFAS.
- Visit the following websites:
 - » ATSDR website: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfc/index.html>
 - » ATSDR's PFAS Clinician Factsheet: https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfc/docs/pfas_clinician_fact_sheet_508.pdf
 - » Environmental Protection Agency website: <https://www.epa.gov/chemical-research/research-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas>
- Contact your state health department.
- Contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission at **(800)-638-2772** if you have questions about the products you use in your home.