

# Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What are PFAS?

Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a large group of man-made chemicals that have been used in industry and consumer products worldwide since the 1950s.

- PFAS do not occur naturally, but are widespread in the environment.
- PFAS are found in people, wildlife and fish all over the world.
- Some PFAS can stay in people's bodies a long time.
- Some PFAS do not break down easily in the environment.



### How can I be exposed to PFAS?

PFAS contamination may be in drinking water, food, indoor dust, some consumer products, and workplaces. Most non worker exposures occur through drinking contaminated water or eating food that contains PFAS.

Although some types of PFAS are no longer used, some products may still contain PFAS:

- Food packaging materials
- Nonstick cookware
- Stain resistant carpet treatments
- Water resistant clothing
- Cleaning products
- Paints, varnishes and sealants
- Firefighting foam
- Some cosmetics



### How can I reduce my exposure to PFAS?

PFAS are present at low levels in some food products and in the environment (air, water, soil etc.), so you probably cannot prevent PFAS exposure altogether. However, if you live near known sources of PFAS contamination, you can take steps to reduce your risk of exposure.

- If your drinking water contains PFAS above the EPA Lifetime Health Advisory, consider using an alternative or treated water source for any activity in which you might swallow water:
  - » drinking
  - » food preparation
  - » cooking
  - » brushing teeth, and
  - » preparing infant formula
- Check for fish advisories for water bodies where you fish.
  - » Follow fish advisories that tell people to stop or limit eating fish from waters contaminated with PFAS or other compounds.
  - » Research has shown the benefits of eating fish, so continue to eat fish from safe sources as part of your healthy diet.
- Read consumer product labels and avoid using those with PFAS.



## How can PFAS affect people's health?

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. Although more research is needed, 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 and
- increase the risk of cancer

At this time, scientists are still learning about the health effects of exposures to mixtures of PFAS.

## How can I learn more?

You can visit the following websites for more information:

- **CDC/ATSDR:**
  - » CDC Info: <https://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/>, or (800) 232-4636.
  - » [www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfc/index.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfc/index.html)
  - » <https://www.cdc.gov/exposurereport/index.html>
- **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):**  
<https://www.epa.gov/chemical-research/research-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas>
- **Food and Drug Administration:**  
<https://www.fda.gov/food/newsevents/constituentupdates/ucm479465.htm>
- **National Toxicology Program:**  
<https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/pubhealth/hat/noms/pfoa/index.html>

If you have questions about the products you use in your home, please contact the **Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)** at (800) 638-2772.

## List of Common PFAS and Their Abbreviations:

Abbreviation	Chemical name
PFOS	Perfluorooctane sulfonic acid
PFOA (or C8)	Perfluorooctanoic acid
PFNA	Perfluorononanoic acid
PFDA	Perfluorodecanoic acid
PFOSA (or FOSA)	Perfluorooctane sulfonamide
MeFOSAA (aka Me-PFOSA-AcOH)	2-(N-Methyl-perfluorooctane sulfonamido) acetic acid
Et-FOSAA (aka Et-PFOSA-AcOH)	2-(N-Ethyl-perfluorooctane sulfonamido) acetic acid
PFHxS	Perfluorohexane sulfonic acid