**Perfluoroalkyl (or polyfluoroalkyl) substances (PFAS) and human health**

**Summary for General Practitioners (GPs)**

# (Guidance initially developed in February 2018, updated in November 2023)

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| **In late 2017, the Ministry for the Environment – Manatū Mō Te Taiao – began an all-of-Government programme to help councils and landowners to investigate the extent of PFAS contamination in New Zealand, and to guide them on managing this emerging contaminant. The Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora – supported this work.**  **Crown sites, such as New Zealand Defence Force – Te Ope Kātua o Aotearoa – bases that have historically used fluorinated firefighting foams, undertook investigations. Regional councils around the country also undertook their own investigations into PFAS to understand the sites that may pose a risk to their communities, alongside other contaminated land issues.**  **More information about this work is available at:** <https://environment.govt.nz/publications/pfas-per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances/>  **The following summary information is adapted from the information provided to GPs in 2018.** |

Perfluoroalkyl or polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are manmade compounds produced since the 1950s. Most of what is known about the health effects of PFAS comes from studies of two compounds, perfluorooctane sulphonic acid (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).

PFOS and PFOA were in class B firefighting foams for fighting flammable liquid fires used by the New Zealand Defence Force from the 1970s until 2002. In 2017, the drinking-water source for some households near RNZAF Bases at Ohakea and Woodbourne was found to be contaminated with PFOS and/or PFOA above Manatū Hauora interim guidance levels.

As part of the programme, Manatū Hauora funded a free GP consultation for people with PFAS-contaminated drinking-water who have health concerns about their PFAS exposure and were referred by a medical officer of health. This approach was precautionary as the health effects of PFAS are uncertain.

The purpose of the GP consultation was for people to receive a full general medical examination. This allowed an opportunity for general health to be assessed, irrespective of cause. For patients who had no pre-existing health conditions, the examination focused on maintaining and improving their general health. For patients with pre-existing health conditions, the examination focused on maximising their health status. Ordering of laboratory or other tests were at the GP’s discretion. Any abnormal findings were managed following usual practice.

A serum PFAS test was not recommended but could be arranged if the GP considered that this would be to the patient’s benefit despite test limitations.

Please see *Perfluoroalkyl (or polyfluoroalkyl) substances (PFAS) and Human Health: Information for General Practitioners* for more detailed information.

If required, further advice on PFAS and health effects is available from health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora. Please contact your local medical officer of health if you wish to arrange this. You can also try Healthline 0800 611 116.

Information about the Ministry for the Environment programme is available at:

<https://environment.govt.nz/what-government-is-doing/areas-of-work/land/per-and-poly-fluoroalkyl-substances-pfas/>

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