How can PFCs affect my health?

If you are exposed to PFCs, whether or not you may experience health effects depends on how much PFC you are exposed to, how long you are exposed, and personal factors including age, lifestyle and how healthy you are.

Overall, we don’t know a lot about the health effects of PFCs. We know the most about PFOA and PFOS. Some human studies show that increased exposure to PFOA and PFOS might increase the risk for certain health problems such as increases in blood cholesterol, liver enzymes, and uric acid levels, which may be linked with an increased risk of heart disease, liver disease or high blood pressure. Other studies show a possible link - but not a cause and effect relationship - between levels of PFOA and PFOS in the blood and low birth weight, thyroid disease, some immune system effects, kidney cancer and testicular cancer.

There is very limited scientific information on the health effects of other PFCs, such as PFHxS, PFBS and PFHpA. While it is possible that these other PFCs may have health effects similar to PFOA and PFOS, there is not enough scientific information to be sure at this time. There is also not enough scientific information to evaluate the health effects of mixtures of PFCs at this time.

What does it mean when levels of PFCs are higher than EPA’s health advisory value?

When levels of PFCs in water are higher than the health advisory level, this tells us to initiate actions to protect humans from coming in contact with the substance. These actions could be taken at the water company by changing how different sources of water are blended or by the consumer by using bottled or treated water. A health advisory value is not a clear line between drinking water levels that cause health effects and those that do not.

Based on the information we have received from public water systems that draw water from the Widefield Aquifer, the levels of PFOA and PFOS in tap water are below the current EPA health advisory levels for all publicly supplied drinking water.

Do PFCs affect children differently?

Infants may be at higher risk of health problems from PFCs because they drink much more water compared to their body weight than older people. While what we know about the health effects of PFCs in children is limited, some studies show links (not a cause-and-effect relationship) between levels of PFCs in the blood and lower birth weight, problems with cognitive and behavioral development, immune system effects, and cholesterol levels.

Is there a medical test to show if I have PFCs in my body? What would the test tell me?

PFCs can be measured in your blood, but this is not a routine test that most doctors know how to order. PFCs are found at low levels in almost everyone’s blood. PFCs can stay in the blood for several years after you were exposed. Testing can tell if a person’s PFC level is lower than, similar to, or higher than the blood levels of the general population. However, results of blood tests don’t show whether you might have health problems from exposure to PFCs.

Should I see a doctor?

If you or your family are concerned about your health or have symptoms you think are caused by PFC exposure, you should discuss your concerns with your health care provider.

More information

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