

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Limited PFC Blood Testing

Morgan, Lawrence and Limestone Counties, Alabama

Background

In 2008, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) began testing water and soil in the Decatur area for the family of chemicals called perfluorochemicals (PFCs). The EPA has found PFC chemicals in agricultural fields treated with sludge from the local wastewater treatment plant and in two private wells. The owners of the two drinking wells were immediately provided bottled water and connected to the public water supply system. Testing of the public drinking water system shows PFC levels are below current provisional guidelines.

PFC Chemicals

People that work or live near these fields may come into contact with these chemicals. These chemicals are used to produce non-stick cookware, moisture-resistant paper coating, stain-resistant carpets and fabrics, nail polishes and fire-fighting foam.

Because of their wide spread use, most people in the U.S. have some PFC chemicals in their body. Once the PFCs are in a person's body, it takes an average of about four years for the level in the body to go down by half, even if no more is taken in.

PFC Chemicals and Health

There is still much to learn about the health effects associated from PFC chemicals. Some studies suggest that lower birth weight, increased cholesterol and changes in liver function may be associated with PFC chemicals. Yet, other studies have not shown the same associations; therefore, there is still much debate about how PFC chemicals may affect humans.

Because many factors can contribute to health problems, it is not possible to link a person's health problem directly to their blood PFC level. In general, more research is needed to understand the effects on human health from PFC chemicals.

Limited PFC Blood Testing

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, a federal public health agency, is offering to test people's blood for PFCs to find out exactly how much of this chemical is getting into a person's body. People who have potential contact with PFCs in soil or water are eligible to be tested. A maximum of 200 people will be tested. The test is free.

Reason for Blood Testing

It is not known how much PFCs can get into a person's body from soil and water contact in the area. This testing may help us understand more about the amount of chemical that is present in people who have more PFC contact than other people in the area. Because these chemicals are currently not regulated by EPA, there are no regulations to determine further action by government agencies. If significantly high levels are found in the blood of participants, then government agencies can use this information to direct their future work.

If the blood testing shows that the PFC blood levels are normal or low, then community residents can be reassured that their risk of getting PFCs into their blood is the same or lower than most of the U.S. population.

Eligibility for Blood Testing

A person is eligible to participate if they meet two types of criteria listed below.

Property criteria:

- Lives on or near soil that may have PFCs on it and/or may have been drinking PFC containing water in the past or currently
- Has lived on current property for at least 1 year

Personal criteria:

- Is 12 years of age or older
- Has not worked in a job where PFCs are used or produced
- Does not have anemia (low blood) or a bleeding disorder

Eligible families will be sent a letter if their home meets the property criteria. To get tested, a family member must also meet all the personal criteria. The letter will provide details about enrolling in the testing effort. Participation in this testing is voluntary.

Pros and Cons of PFC Testing

Pros

- Learn how much of the PFC chemicals is in your blood
- Get written information about PFCs
- Individual blood test results will be kept private
- Testing is free to qualified participants

Cons

- **No** other medical tests, diagnosis, or treatment will be offered
- Scientists do not definitively know how PFC levels in the blood can affect a person's health, more research is needed, so we:
 - **Cannot** tell a person if the PFC levels in their blood will make them sick now or later in life
 - **Cannot** tell a person if their current health problems are related to the PFC levels found in their body
 - **Cannot** tell a person how or from where the PFC chemicals entered their body

Testing Date

The blood testing will be done in early spring 2010.

Results

Results will be mailed to participants about 6 months after the blood is drawn. It takes 6 months for the results because this is a special test that most doctors and labs do not offer. We will come back to the area and meet with your community again, provide a summary of the testing effort and answer questions. Personal test results will be kept private. Only a summary of the results will be shared with the community.

More Information

For more information about limited PFC blood testing call ATSDR toll-free: 1-800-232-4636 and ask for Dr. Ketna Mistry.