

SUCCESS STORY

ATSDR Leads Charge to Reduce PFAS Exposure

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. Virtually all Americans may have some contact with these widely used compounds. These compounds have historically been used to make fire retardants, oil and water repellents, stain-resistant furniture and carpets, waterproof clothes, take out containers, and non-stick cookware. During production and use, PFAS can migrate into the soil, water, and air. Many PFAS do not easily degrade, so they remain in the environment. Because of their widespread use and persistence in the environment, PFAS can be found in the blood of people and animals all over the world. Since 1999, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) has measured PFAS in blood samples from the U.S. population. NHANES finds that most people in the United States have been exposed to PFAS and have PFAS in their blood.

ATSDR is working with more than 30 communities across the United States to protect Americans from the possible health effects associated with PFAS.

“Our PFAS activities play an important foundation for future evaluations of PFAS exposure and allow us to effectively respond to needs identified by communities across the country.”

RACHEL WORLEY, PHD, ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SCIENTIST, ATSDR

Scientists are still learning about the health effects of PFAS, but studies suggest that long-term exposure can be linked to higher rates of certain cancers, higher cholesterol levels, suppressed immune systems, fertility issues in women, and weakened antibody responses to vaccinations among children.

Read on to learn more about ATSDR's commitment to reduce the spread of PFAS in our communities.

SUCCESS STORY

ATSDR ADDRESSES PFAS IN THE COMMUNITY—FORMER NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER (NAWC)

ATSDR worked with the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help protect nearly 40,000 people in Warminster, Pennsylvania from exposure to PFAS-contaminated water. ATSDR's involvement in this community began in 2014, at the request of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). During routine testing of both groundwater at the NAWC and public drinking water in 2013, the agencies found high levels of PFAS in groundwater in the area. ATSDR partnered with the Navy and EPA to evaluate concentrations of PFAS in drinking water and conduct a public health evaluation of the resulting exposures. ATSDR's work supported the EPA and Navy's efforts to continue monitoring drinking water supplies, to permanently mitigate exposures from public drinking water and private wells, and to provide bottled water to community members with elevated drinking water concentrations. These efforts included testing more than 100 residential wells and connecting those with contaminated well water to public water systems. In 2016, a review of the site revealed that the actions put in place are helping to protect Americans from the harmful health effects of PFAS. ATSDR helped play a critical role in helping share health information about PFAS with concerned residents and their health professionals in this community.