Introduction

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is a public health agency that evaluates environmental exposures for public health risks. ATSDR has released a health consultation on drinking water contamination at the Pease Tradeport PWS. The health consultation evaluated whether water containing PFAS posed a health threat to people who drank it any time since 1993. Those people included workers at the Pease International Tradeport. They also included children at the two childcare centers at the Pease International Tradeport. This fact sheet summarizes ATSDR's findings, released in April 1, 2019. The full report is titled “Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) in the Pease Tradeport Public Water System (PWS).” You can find the report at https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/PHA/HCPHA.asp?State=NH.

The Pease Tradeport PWS serves the Pease International Tradeport and the New Hampshire Air National Guard base at the former Pease Air Force Base (AFB). PFAS in the Pease Tradeport PWS likely came from aqueous film-forming foam (AFFF) used on the former Pease AFB, now the site of Pease International Tradeport. The base used AFFF to fight fires.

Summary of Key Findings

• Drinking water from the Pease Tradeport PWS between January 1993 through May 2014 could have increased the risk for harmful health effects to Pease International Tradeport workers and children attending the childcare centers. Other possible sources of exposure to users of the Pease Tradeport PWS include food and consumer products. Those could increase the risk for harmful effects beyond the risk from the drinking water exposures alone.

• Exposure to perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS), and perfluorohexane sulfonic acid (PFHxS) can depress the immune response, increase cholesterol, slow growth and development, and cause liver damage.

• Community members, particularly mothers exposed to PFAS from the Pease Tradeport PWS, have concerns about the possible health effects of PFAS exposures to infants who breastfeeding. Based on available scientific information, ATSDR concludes that the health and nutritional benefits of breastfeeding outweigh the risks associated with PFAS in breast milk.

• Consuming water from the Pease Tradeport PWS after May 2014 is not expected to cause people harm.

Bottom Line

The health consultation concluded that Pease International Tradeport workers and children who attended the childcare centers were exposed to PFAS by drinking contaminated water. The water was supplied to the Pease International Tradeport before the Haven well was shut down in May 2014. Drinking water from the Pease Tradeport PWS during this time might have increased the risk for some harmful health effects. The cancer risk from past exposure to all PFAS in the Pease Tradeport PWS is uncertain.

Though the Haven well has shut down, there are still low levels of PFAS in the water serving the Pease Tradeport PWS. ATSDR does not expect that consuming water containing low levels of PFAS from the Pease Tradeport PWS (after May 2014) will harm people. However, persons who were exposed to PFAS from the Pease Tradeport Water System in the past should be aware of ways to reduce future PFAS exposures. Information on ways to reduce exposures to all sources of PFAS is available at https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/pfas-exposure.html.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
ATSDR Recommendations to Agencies

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES), and the U.S. Air Force (USAF) do the following:

- Continue their studies to better describe PFAS groundwater contamination at the site and monitor the Pease Tradeport PWS for any changes in PFAS amounts
- Continue PFAS removal from the Pease Tradeport PWS and set up a long-term plan to reduce PFAS to the lowest possible levels
- Continue to provide health education regarding PFAS in drinking water to residents who might be exposed, other community members, and health professionals in the site area

ATSDR will present the findings of this report and ATSDR’s health consultation provides information that might help in this decision-making process.

Next Steps

- ATSDR will continue to work with the Pease International Tradeport Community Assistance Panel (CAP) to help understand community concerns and gather input to enhance the understanding of the health effects of PFAS exposures.

- ATSDR is assessing the most appropriate and effective designs for a multi-site PFAS health study to look at the relationship between PFAS exposure and health outcomes. As a foundation for the multi-site health study, ATSDR is preparing for exposure assessments in communities near current and former military installations. ATSDR is also planning a “proof of concept” health study of children and adults exposed to PFAS-contaminated drinking water at the Pease International Tradeport. The study will test procedures for use in the future multi-site study. The study will also evaluate associations between PFAS levels in blood and signs of changes in the body. Those changes will be examined using biomarkers, which can include examining changes in lipids, kidney or thyroid function, and the development of specific diseases.

ATSDR Community Recommendations

- Persons who have had long-term exposures to PFAS should be aware of ways to reduce exposures. To learn more, visit: https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/docs/pfas_fact_sheet.pdf.

- Continue to breastfeed babies, even if you have been exposed to PFAS. More than 20 years of research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that breastmilk nourishes infants and protects them from illness. A woman’s decision to breastfeed is an individual choice — one that is made after considering many different factors. ATSDR’s health consultation provides information that might help in this decision-making process.

- If you are concerned about exposure you or your family might have had, talk to your health care provider. ATSDR is available to consult with any health care provider, as needed.

For More Information

ATSDR

- Call ATSDR at 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636), email cdc.gov/info or visit www.atsdr.cdc.gov


- PFAS: https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/pfas/index.html


CDC


EPA

- Pease AFB: https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/csitinfo.cfm?id=0101213

New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services

- Perfluorochemicals: https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/pfcs/index.htm