

BRIEFING

How to talk with your doctor about PFAS exposure

April 2023

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) have been in our environment and our bodies for many years, but our understanding of how they got there and what can be done is relatively new. Most health professionals have not been trained in how to respond to contamination in their communities or the related health concerns expressed by their patients. For individuals exposed to high levels of PFAS, talking to a doctor without support can be a daunting task.

Fortunately, a few organisations have developed resources that you can bring to your health professionals to engage with them and discuss preventive measures to protect your health. These are described below. In addition, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) has information on biomonitoring for affected communities and getting tested for PFAS exposure.

Resources for affected communities

- **Guidance on PFAS exposure, testing and clinical follow-up**

- [This website](#) from the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, which can be emailed to your doctor, explains how PFAS get into the environment, what are sources of exposure (for example, drinking water and certain occupations), and potential health effects. The tab "[Guidance for Clinical Care](#)" offers important information for health professionals about interpreting PFAS levels and providing follow up care and treatment for health conditions associated with PFAS. For example, at a blood PFAS level of 20 ng/mL or greater, clinicians are advised to screen for dyslipidemia, thyroid dysfunction (for patients over 18), and signs and symptoms of testicular cancer (for patients over 15), ulcerative colitis, and kidney cancer (for patients over 45). Other health conditions with emerging evidence of their association with PFAS are described in the "[Potential Health Effects](#)" tab of the website.

Information from the website is also available as an easy-to-read five-page summary, which can be printed and handed to your health professional. Similar to [the website](#), it identifies levels of PFAS in human blood that raise concern for certain adverse health effects, and provides guidance for doctors to assess a patient's risk. The [full report](#) can also be downloaded for free.

For more information:

Natacha Cingotti

natacha@env-health.org+32 (0) 2 329 00 81 · www.env-health.org

Information and guidance for health professionals

- This [two-page fact sheet](#) from the US PFAS-REACH Project provides guidance for doctors discussing PFAS exposure and health follow-up care decisions with their patients. It includes information for adult and pediatric patients on PFAS blood tests, laboratory tests for certain health conditions, clinical examinations, and counseling topics.
- This [one-hour video for health professionals](#), produced by the US PFAS-REACH Project, is designed to increase clinical knowledge and understanding of PFAS, help recognize likely PFAS environmental exposures, and prevent further exposure.

Are you a health professional interested in developing information for patients on PFAS exposure and getting involved in raising awareness on the topic in the health community? Get in touch with our HEAL team for support and to collaborate by contacting us at info@env-health.org.

Additional resources about PFAS exposure and pollution

- If you live in an area with known PFAS pollution, you might be seeking ways to get tested to find out more about your own exposure levels. One way to do this is to engage in a conversation with your doctor to explore ways to get tested:
 - [EUROFINS](#) is a leading international network of laboratories that commonly performs tests for the presence of chemical contaminants. They have long performed PFAS testing in various environmental media, including water, soil and feed, and in consumer products.
 - The [European Biomonitoring Initiative HBM4EU](#) has made available a [map of laboratories](#) with quality control/assurance as part of the programme or with experience in human biomonitoring. Browsing the map allows you to see which labs might be available in your country and which chemicals they test.
- To help medical professionals better understand how communities living in or around highly PFAS-contaminated areas are affected, biomonitoring is a necessary tool for determining levels of human exposure, establishing trends over time, and interpreting those in relation to potential long-term health impacts.

To support affected communities and clinicians, HEAL developed a [briefing on PFAS exposure and biomonitoring](#).

- Journalists, civil society groups and academics are frequently releasing new research and resources to map out sites contaminated by PFAS chemicals. The following resources can be shared with your health professional to help them better understand the scope of the problem that PFAS poses to our health and the environment:
 - In April 2023, HEAL launched an [online hub mapping out five of the most notorious PFAS-contaminated sites across Europe](#) in Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, and the Netherlands. The website includes details of local contamination events and responses, but also more general resources on PFAS such as summaries of known health effects and resources on how to take action.
 - In February 2023, an unprecedented cross-country media investigation on PFAS contamination – [The Forever Pollution Project](#) – revealed that more than 17,000 sites are contaminated by PFAS chemicals around Europe. The investigation furthermore showed an additional 21,000 presumptive contamination sites due to current or past industrial activities.

Natacha Cingotti

Health and Chemicals Programme Lead
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)
E-mail: natacha@env-health.org
Tel: +32 (0) 2 329 00 81


Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

Avenue des Arts 7/8
1210 Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 329 00 80
E-mail: info@env-health.org

 [@HealthandEnv](https://twitter.com/HealthandEnv)

 [@healthandenvironmentalliance](https://www.facebook.com/healthandenvironmentalliance)

 [Health and Environment Alliance](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Health-and-Environment-Alliance)

 [@healthandenvironmentalliance](https://www.instagram.com/healthandenvironmentalliance)



The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health.

HEAL's over 90 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region.

As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future.



HEAL gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the European Union (EU), the Tides Foundation, and the Adessium Foundation for the production of this publication. The responsibility for the content lies with the authors and the views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU institutions and funders. The European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) and the funders are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained in this publication.

HEAL's EU Transparency Register Number: 00723343929-96