

North Kent County PFAS Exposure Assessment: Questions and Answers

What is the North Kent PFAS Exposure Assessment project?

The purpose of this exposure assessment is to:

- learn the amounts of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the blood of people from North Kent County who had PFAS in their private drinking water wells,
- compare that to amounts of PFAS in the U.S. population,
- collect water samples that represent current amounts of PFAS in the participant's private drinking water, and
- identify factors that can affect how much PFAS is in people's blood.

Households that are eligible to be selected had their drinking water tested by or at the direction of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) as part of the House Street or North Kent environmental investigation. Everyone who lives in a selected household is eligible to be part of the project. Unfortunately, not all households can be selected.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and Kent County Health Department (KCHD) are working together on this project.

What are PFAS?

PFAS are a large group of manmade chemicals that are resistant to heat, water, and oil. PFAS have been found in some drinking water wells in the northern part of Kent County. For more information on PFAS and health, visit www.michigan.gov/pfasresponse or see the factsheet, "PFAS in Drinking Water."

What is MDHHS testing for in blood?

We will be testing blood for 24 PFAS. Blood will NOT be used for any other tests, such as alcohol, drug, or DNA testing.

How can I join the project?

Selected households will be contacted by MDHHS with instructions.

How will I know if I was selected to participate in the project?

MDHHS will send a letter asking you and members of your household to participate. If your household is selected, MDHHS will send letters and make phone calls to try to reach you. Staff will make multiple attempts to find out if members of your household are interested in participating in the project.

When will selected households be invited by MDHHS?

During November, MDHHS mailed packets to the first group of selected households, inviting them to participate in the project. MDHHS will invite additional selected households to participate through Spring 2019.

How will participation help?

Participation in the project will help local, state, and federal agencies understand the amount of PFAS exposure in the community.

Participation may also help advance PFAS research nationally and help inform decisions about how to protect communities from PFAS.

I used to live at a house that could be selected for the project, but I no longer live there. Why can't I be part of the project?

The exposure assessment is designed to represent the community's exposure to PFAS from drinking PFAS containing water from private wells. The method to make it representative of this group of people is based on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)'s Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) Exposure Assessment Technical Tool (PEATT) and technical assistance from ATSDR professionals. Following this method, households are selected first and then people from within the household. Including people who do not currently live in the household would not accurately represent the community's exposure.

The results of the exposure assessment will help to inform the need for conducting further research in this region. People who are not in this exposure assessment could be eligible for future studies. Please see "Why aren't KCHD and MDHHS doing a health study?" on page 3 for more information about the possibility of future studies.

I didn't receive a packet from MDHHS. Can I be included in the project?

The MDHHS is inviting households in groups over several months, so it is possible you could still be invited to participate. However, not everyone can be included in the project.

Why can't everyone be included in the project?

The MDHHS and KCHD want to make sure that PFAS exposure in people whose wells had PFAS could be measured. As a result, the focus is on households whose drinking water test found PFAS at 70 parts per trillion (ppt) or higher. Some households that had less than 70 ppt of PFAS in their drinking water will also be invited to participate.

For more on how participants will be selected, see the section, "Who is eligible to participate in the North Kent County PFAS Exposure Assessment project?" on page 4.

What will happen during the clinic appointment?

Clinic appointments will take about 1.5 hours. During the appointment, we will ask participants questions about the ways a person might come into contact with PFAS chemicals including questions about drinking water. These questions also include some health-related questions that impact how long PFAS stays in blood. Next, a medical professional will draw a small sample, about 4 teaspoons, of blood.

As a separately scheduled time, participants will have their home's water tested for PFAS.

What will happen during the water sample appointment?

Participants will have a scheduled 2-hour window for MDHHS staff to come to their home to collect a sample or samples of their water and gather information about the home's plumbing and any water filters.

Which laboratory is testing participant's blood and water for PFAS?

Participant's blood and water samples will be sent to the MDHHS's laboratory in Lansing, MI and tested there. The MDHHS laboratory follows CDC's laboratory procedures.

Will participants get their test results?

Participants who want their blood test and water test results will receive a letter with their results.

What can your blood test results tell you?

Your blood test results will tell you the amount of PFAS in your blood at the time it was drawn.

What can't your blood test results tell you?

Your blood test result cannot tell you if the PFAS in your blood has harmed your health or will harm you in the future.

Will other people know my test results if I participate?

All the information collected for this project is private and protected by Michigan law. Participants' answers and test results will be stored using a code instead of their name. Project staff are bound by law not to disclose participants' information.

Any reports or articles that are written about the project will only talk about group results. They will not include information that could identify a participant, such as name or address.

What is the difference between an exposure assessment and a health study?

An exposure assessment can measure the amount of certain chemicals in blood or urine. Information about ways people might have come into contact with the chemicals can help explain the amount of the chemicals in their body. An exposure assessment does not link health conditions to the chemicals.

A health study also measures the amount of chemicals in blood and urine and collects information on health conditions. This type of study looks for links between certain health conditions and chemical exposure.

Why aren't KCHD and MDHHS doing a health study?

Understanding the health impact of PFAS on a community starts with confirming that people with elevated PFAS exposure can be identified and successfully recruited. The North Kent County PFAS Exposure Assessment will determine elevated PFAS exposure by comparing participant blood results to the CDC's National Health and Nutrition and Examination Survey (NHANES). Using a questionnaire, the exposure assessment will seek to identify exposure factors that result in elevated PFAS blood levels.

An informative PFAS health study needs to include enough people with a range of elevated PFAS exposure to see links between health conditions and PFAS exposure. Previously published studies have needed thousands of people to link past PFAS exposure to health conditions. The number of people with PFAS in their drinking water in North Kent County may not be enough for an informative health study, however, this exposure assessment might enable community members from North Kent County to be part of a larger group of people in a PFAS health study that the CDC-ATSDR plans to fund.

Who is eligible to participate in the North Kent County PFAS Exposure Assessment project?

Selecting households

Households are selected from those in the North Kent County environmental investigation area whose drinking water well was tested by, or at the direction of, the DEQ. To be part of this group of potential households, PFAS must have been found, or detected, in the household drinking water sample. All households with more than total 70 ppt in their drinking water sample will be invited to participate.

From households who had less than 70 ppt of total PFAS in their drinking water, some households will be invited to participate. Each household in this group (less than 70 ppt total PFAS in drinking water) will have an equal chance to be invited to participate.

From the selected households, adults will be eligible for consideration as participants in this project if:

- their household was contacted by MDHHS with an invitation to participate in the project,
- they confirm they currently live at that residence,
- they confirm they lived at that residence on or before January 1, 2018, and
- they used their private well water for drinking.

Minors who live in households that are contacted with an invitation to participate may do so if:

- their legal guardian consents to their participation,
- they agree, to participate (if 12 years and older), and
- they weigh at least 16 pounds (lbs)

Want more information?

If you have questions about the project, please call the MDHHS Division of Environmental Health at 800-648-6942. Project updates will also be provided at www.accesskent.com/health/pfas and www.michigan.gov/belmont.

