

North Kent County Exposure Assessment Webinar Q&A

9/16/2020

Note: The questions below are verbatim from the webinar.

Webinar 1 (12:00 – 1:30 pm)

Question: Can my wife, who lived and worked in Rockford near Wolverine Worldwide, get tested for PFAS or participate in the studies?

Answer: For two upcoming health studies, the Michigan PFAS Exposure and Health Study (MiPEHS, pronounced *my-peez*) and the ATSDR Multi-site Study (MSS), individuals who had their private drinking water wells tested for PFAS by a state agency in the Belmont/Rockford area or in the Parchment and Cooper Township area may be eligible. Full eligibility criteria can be found on our website, [Michigan.gov/DEHBio](https://www.michigan.gov/DEHBio). Individuals whom MDHHS expects to be eligible will be sent a letter inviting them to participate in the studies. Please call 855-322-3037 to see if you are eligible to participate in MiPEHS or MSS.

Question: Is there evidence that PFAS remain in the system over time?

Answer:

This question could be interpreted as asking about PFAS in the body or about PFAS in the water system, so both systems will be addressed below:

Regarding PFAS in the body: The body can slowly eliminate PFAS. If you were previously drinking from a water source that is contaminated by PFAS but now you are no longer drinking from that water source, your PFAS levels have likely declined over time. Depending on the specific type of PFAS, the time it takes to remove them from your body can range from days to many years. This property is called the biological half-life and is different per PFAS and varies per person.

Regarding PFAS in the water system: There is very limited research on cleaning PFAS from plumbing, holding tanks, or water heaters. However, there is some data from Parchment, Michigan that may be relevant to this question. On July 26, 2018, it was discovered that the Parchment municipal water supply had very high levels of PFAS ([1,600 ppt total PFAS](#)) and a drinking water advisory went into effect. City officials then began connecting the Parchment municipal supply to the Kalamazoo municipal supply (which had much lower levels of PFAS). After city-wide flushing of the Parchment municipal system with Kalamazoo municipal system water, PFAS levels dropped substantially and have remained stable since the drinking water advisory for Parchment was lifted on August 27, 2018. You can view recent levels in the Kalamazoo municipal supply at [this link](#) on the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team website by

searching for “Kalamazoo” under the column header “Public Water Supply.” Please contact EGLE at 1-800-662-9278 or the [City of Parchment Public Works and Water](#) for more information.

Question: How will you approach the rest of Michigan’s citizens for future studies?

Answer: The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) has two PFAS health studies, the Michigan PFAS Exposure and Health Study (MiPEHS, pronounced *my-pez*) and the ATSDR Multi-site Study (MSS), occurring in the Belmont/Rockford area and in the City of Parchment and Cooper Township.

MDHHS follows a standard approach to conducting public health investigations that takes into account the existing science on hazards like PFAS. This approach involves first identifying local sources of hazardous chemicals. Second, it involves confirming there is a means for humans to be exposed to the hazardous chemicals. At this stage, MDHHS may take additional steps, such as exposure assessment (such as the North Kent County Exposure Assessment) to determine the extent of exposure and exposure mitigation. If the existing science on the hazard and exposure conditions indicate that the community is at more than minimal risk of harm, and if the exposures occur at high levels among a large number of people, the evidence supports conducting a health study.

MiPEHS and MSS are investigations of PFAS exposure that followed this pathway. Results and knowledge gained from health studies such as MiPEHS and MSS will apply to everybody, as we are seeking to better understand the relationship between PFAS exposure and health. These studies expand PFAS research by looking at a wider range of PFAS chemicals than other studies. While there is minimal to no benefit to study participants from an individual medical perspective, participants contribute to knowledge that benefits all communities experiencing similar exposures. Even if you are not directly participating, the results from these studies will still be informative and beneficial.

MDHHS will decide to conduct future studies in other parts of the state using the same approach described above. In addition to MiPEHS and MSS, other community exposure investigations involving blood testing and other types of data collection may be planned.

In addition to site-specific projects, statewide projects, like the PFAS in Firefighters of Michigan Surveillance (PFOMS) and the Michigan Chemical Exposure Monitoring project (MiChEM), will be rolling out in Michigan over the next few years and will invite eligible participants. If you are invited to join these projects, we appreciate your participation. Find out more about these projects at Michigan.gov/DEHbio.

Question: Can you summarize the effects of PFAS on the body?

Answer: PFAS are a group of diverse compounds, which may have different effects on the human body. Since only a handful of PFAS have been studied, there is not enough supporting research to come up with a completely comprehensive list. However, based on current scientific research, we know that some PFAS have been linked to:

- Increased cholesterol levels
- Changes in liver enzymes
- Decreased vaccine response in children
- Increased risk of high blood pressure or pre-eclampsia in pregnant women
- Small decreases in infant birth weights
- Increased risk of kidney or testicular cancer

If you are concerned about your individual health in relation to PFAS exposure, there are [resources](#) available from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) that you can view online. This includes a [fact sheet](#) that you can bring to your doctor or physician to help start a conversation about PFAS and potential health effects.

If you would like to talk to a MDHHS toxicologist, call 1-800-648-6942.

Webinar 2 (6:30 – 8:00 pm)

Question: Is it possible to clean PFAS out of pipes, hoses, holding tanks, and water heaters?

Answer: There is very limited research on cleaning PFAS from plumbing, holding tanks, or water heaters. However, there is some data from Parchment, Michigan that may be relevant. On July 26, 2018, it was discovered that the Parchment municipal supply had very high levels of PFAS (over 1,600 ppt total PFAS). City officials began connecting the Parchment municipal supply to the Kalamazoo municipal supply, which had much lower levels of PFAS. City officials then began connecting the Parchment municipal supply to the Kalamazoo municipal supply (which had much lower levels of PFAS). After city-wide flushing of the Parchment municipal system with Kalamazoo municipal system water, PFAS levels dropped substantially and have remained stable since the drinking water advisory for Parchment was lifted on August 27, 2018. Please contact the EGLE at 1-800-662-9278) or the [City of Parchment Public Works and Water](#) for more information.

Question: How can I get tested for PFAS?

Answer: There are approximately three private labs in the U.S. that accept blood samples to be tested for PFAS; however, this testing often costs several hundreds of dollars. It is important to understand the limitations to testing for PFAS. Here are a few things to keep in mind regarding PFAS blood tests:

- Blood tests for PFAS can only tell you the level of PFAS in your blood at the time it was tested.
- This level can change over time.
- The body does slowly eliminate PFAS in your blood. For example, if you were drinking from a contaminated water source but are no longer drinking that water, your PFAS levels have likely declined over time.
- PFAS testing would not likely reflect what your PFAS levels were in the past or how they have changed over time.
- Blood tests are also limited because they cannot tell you whether PFAS has harmed your health in the past or present or will harm your health in the future.

Question: Since many people had filters on their water when they were tested, how do you determine the amount of PFAS in the water?

Answer: The water samples that we took for the North Kent County Exposure Assessment (NKCEA) were collected both pre- and post- filter. The pre-filter water sample shows the PFAS levels prior to any filtering, so we can better understand that historic exposure and relate that to current blood PFAS levels. The post-filter water sample is also collected to let us know if there is any detectable amount of PFAS that came through the filter. Both values are used to better understand PFAS concentrations and relate these to the current blood levels found in participants.

Question: From July 27, 2018, to present January 2020 – documented mobile home parks residents do not receive information from any state departments. Is it possible to notify every resident directly?

Answer: Some mobile home parks may be on a municipal supply or have their own single well that serves a large number of people. If either of those are the case, more data for your specific location may be available on the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team (MPART) [website](#).

Question: Is there a reason that only well water was tested and not the general public getting the municipal water in the Kent County area?

Answer: The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) has tested all municipal supplies of water, and those test results are available on the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team (MPART) [website](#).

Question: Are there concurrent studies for the North Kent County Exposure Assessment (NKCEA) participants and how their health is affected?

Answer: This webinar is presenting only the first report of the North Kent County Exposure Assessment (NKCEA). However, NKCEA has led us to conduct follow-up studies to better understand the health component. We are inviting more individuals in impacted areas to participate in the upcoming health studies, the Michigan PFAS Exposure and Health Study (MiPEHS) and the ATSDR Multi-site Study (MSS). The first of those studies, MiPEHS, will start later this year. Eligible individuals in the Belmont/Rockford area and the City of Parchment and Cooper Township will receive an invitation letter. You can find out more about these studies at Michigan.gov/DEHbio.

Question: Are there any upcoming in-person meetings scheduled with The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and other agencies included?

Answer: At the current time most public meetings are being held in a virtual format to protect against the spread of COVID-19. Information regarding upcoming public meetings can be found on the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team (MPART) [Public Meeting Calendar](#).