

PFAS in Firefighters of Michigan Surveillance (PFOMS) Frequently Asked Questions

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General Project Information

What is the purpose of the PFOMS project?

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is conducting the PFAS in Firefighters of Michigan Surveillance (PFOMS) project to determine Michigan firefighters' blood concentrations of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), chemicals commonly found in Class B foams. The findings of the project will help inform decisions to minimize firefighters' exposure to PFAS.

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Is this a research study?

This is not a research project. This is a [public health surveillance](#) project. Our investigation will help guide public policy and health education.

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What are Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)?

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a large group of man-made chemicals that are resistant to heat, water, and oil. They are widely used in everyday products such as cookware, clothes, carpets, and firefighting foams. These chemicals do not easily break down in the environment and bioaccumulate, or build up, in the blood and organs. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have classified PFAS as emerging contaminants on the national landscape.

- Source: https://www.michigan.gov/pfasresponse/0,9038,7-365-86704_86677---,00.html

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How can firefighters reduce exposure to PFAS?

According to the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), firefighters can reduce exposure to PFAS by wearing personal protective equipment and a self-contained breathing apparatus whenever handling firefighting foams. You can learn more by visiting the [USFA website](#).

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Fire Department Information

How was my fire department selected?

- All fire departments that support a FAA Part 139 certified airport across the state and their adult firefighters are invited to participate.
- For the Detroit Fire Department, some fire stations were selected at random. All adult firefighters assigned to these selected fire stations are invited to participate.
- Municipal fire departments across the state were selected at random. All adult firefighters working at these fire departments are invited to participate.

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What will happen if my fire department decides to participate in PFOMS?

- The project team will coordinate with your fire department to minimize any interference with operations.
- The project team will ask for certain information from your fire department to make the project a success. This will include a roster of all firefighters in your department, incident response records and how much Class B foams has been used.
- The project team will come to your fire department location for a few consecutive days for data and sample collection. Our blood draw appointments will be in a convenient location for participating firefighters. We will only test for PFAS in their blood. We will not be testing their blood for any drugs, chemicals, and will not be doing any genetic testing.
- Participating firefighters will also be asked to complete an online survey before their blood draw appointment.
- All firefighters working at the invited fire department are encouraged to participate, but it is completely voluntary.
- MDHHS environmental sanitarians will collect samples of the drinking water to measure the amount of PFAS in the drinking water at the fire stations. This time will be scheduled during our introductory phone meeting.
- The project team will send participating firefighters their personal blood PFAS results unless they opt out of receiving their results. They will also receive the results for the drinking water PFAS testing for their department.
- Also, fire departments, and other local municipality contacts as requested, will receive the results from the drinking water PFAS testing and overall results of the PFOMS project.
- There will be no cost to the firefighters or fire departments for the information and samples we collect.

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How can a fire chief enroll their fire department in the project?

- Once invited, the project team will call you soon to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about participating. At that time, you can tell us if your department will participate.
- If you choose to enroll your department, the project team will ask you some questions for planning purposes.
- In the meantime, if you want to enroll your department or have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call us at 844-464-7327 or send us an email at mdhhs-pfoms@michigan.gov

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What can I expect after my fire department is enrolled?

- The project team will work with you to schedule a convenient time and place for data and sample collection.
 - If the mobile lab (38-foot vehicle) is used, we will talk to you about the best place for us to park it. If possible, we would like to park it at one of your department's stations.
- Six to eight weeks before your scheduled participation time the project team will confirm the dates with you and request the firefighter rosters for your fire department. This information will be used to send your firefighters project information and an invitation to participate.
- The project team will ask you who would be the best person at your department to talk to gather information about your department's drinking water source and use of firefighting foams.

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What will water sampling look like at each fire station?

- Each fire station from an invited fire department has an opportunity to have their water collected for PFAS testing by MDHHS environmental sanitarians. A water survey on their drinking water system will also be administered at that time.
- Water appointments will be scheduled prior to your visit from the project team. They will take approximately one hour.
- The MDHHS environmental sanitarians will take up to two water samples from each of your participating fire stations.



- A point of contact at each of your fire stations must be available during the appointment to answer the water survey and grant the MDHHS environmental sanitarians inside access to the fire station building. The point of contact will accompany the sanitarians as they administer the water survey and perform a walkthrough of the station drinking water system.

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Firefighter Information

Why should I, as a firefighter, participate?

If you participate, you will:

- Learn your personal blood PFAS concentrations.
- Contribute to the statewide initiative to determine Michigan firefighters' exposures to PFAS.
- Receive a \$25 gift card as a thank you.

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How will I be asked to participate?

Once an invited fire department decides to participate in the PFOMS project, all firefighters from the fire department will receive a **recruitment packet** via email or in the mail at their fire department address inviting them to participate.

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How do I know if I am eligible to participate in the PFOMS Project?

- If you are interested, please call the project team at 844-464-7327 to confirm eligibility and enroll in the project. Please allow about 10 minutes for the call.
- If you have any additional needs (language, mobility, etc.) please mention this when scheduling your appointment.

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How can I enroll in the project?

- If you are interested, please call 844-464-7327 to confirm eligibility and enroll in the project. You can also email us at MDHHS-pfoms@michigan.gov with your phone number and the best time to call you, and the project team will reach out.
- If we do not receive a call from you, the project team will contact you to talk to you about the project, to confirm eligibility, and enroll you in the project.

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If I enroll in the project, what do I have to do?

- We will ask you to complete an online survey (approximately 45-minute or more) about your potential exposure to PFAS before your appointment and to provide a small sample of blood during your blood draw appointment.
 - We will only test for PFAS in your blood. We will not be testing your blood for any drugs, chemicals, and will not be doing any genetic testing.
- As a thank you for your time, each participant will receive a \$25 gift card for completing the online survey and for participating in the blood draw.

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How should I prepare for my blood draw appointment?

- Please complete the online survey before arriving at your blood draw appointment. To help you with the online survey, we recommend completing the Pre-Survey Worksheet located in your welcome packet. If you are unable to complete the online survey before your appointment, it is still recommended that you complete the Pre-Survey Worksheet as some information needed for the online survey will be from your personal records. In the case you have NOT completed the online survey before your blood draw appointment, bring the Pre-Survey Worksheet with you to your appointment and be prepared to complete the online survey immediately after your appointment.
- Carefully read the Informed Consent document enclosed in the welcome packet. It explains in detail all the elements of participating in the PFOMS project and asks for your permission to collect information and a small sample of blood from you. Within this document you will also be given the option to opt out of receiving your PFAS blood test results. At your blood draw appointment, you will be provided an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the Informed Consent document and then be asked to sign it.
- You do not need to fast prior to your blood draw appointment.

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What will be the process for the blood sampling?

- During your blood draw appointment, you will be asked to give a small sample of blood (10 ml).
- A certified and trained phlebotomist will complete the blood draw.
- We will only measure for PFAS in your blood. We will not be testing your blood for any drugs, chemicals, and will not be doing any genetic testing.

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Will I get my blood sampling results?

- Yes! You will receive your personal blood PFAS results in a letter mailed to your home address 8-10 months after your appointment. You will receive a summary of the project's findings when they are available.
- Your personal blood sample results will not be shared with your fire department, insurance company, or anyone else without your prior approval. We will store your test results using a code number and not your name. Your name and contact information will be stored separate from your test results. This means only authorized staff can match you with your test results. Laws prohibit all project staff from sharing any identifiable information without participant's prior approval. The test results will be stored in electronic form on a secure server. It will be password protected, and only the people who need to have access to the information will have access. Everyone who uses the data will complete a training on how to protect data that are collected. Only authorized project staff members who have signed a confidentiality agreement will have access to an individual's data.

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What will I learn from my blood sampling results?

Your results **can** tell you:

- The amount of PFAS in your blood at the time of your blood draw.

Your results **cannot** tell you:

- Where any PFAS in your blood came from.
- Information about chemicals we did not test for.
- If PFAS have harmed your health.
- If PFAS will harm your health in the future.

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Will my fire station's water be tested for PFAS?

- MDHHS plans to sample water at all fire stations are participating in the PFOMS project.
- Sampling will be performed by trained MDHHS environmental sanitarians.
- Participants will receive water results for all stations that were tested within their department.
- Also, fire departments, and other local municipality contacts as requested, will receive the results from the drinking water PFAS testing.

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How will you protect information I provide?

- We will store your information, survey answers and test results using a code number and not your name. Your name and contact information will be stored separate from your information, survey answers, and test results. This means only authorized staff can match you with your test results.
- Most of the records that will be kept are electronic and will be kept securely in an encrypted electronic file. Some paper records may be collected. These will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet, first at your blood draw appointment site and then at the MDHHS office in Lansing, Michigan.
- Laws prohibit all project staff from sharing any identifiable information without participant's prior approval. The test results and information we collect will be stored in electronic form on a secure server. It will be password protected, and only the people who need to have access to the information will have access. Everyone who uses the data will complete a training on how to protect data that are collected. Only authorized project staff members who have signed a confidentiality agreement will have access to an individual's data.

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How will my information and data be used?

- We will combine everyone's results to characterize PFAS blood concentrations in firefighters who may have experienced occupational exposure to PFAS. This will guide public health decision making to reduce PFAS exposure among firefighters where needed.
- It is possible that we will write reports or scientific articles about the project results. Anything written publicly about the project will only describe group results. It will not include information that could identify any individual participant, such as a name or



address. You will be able to see these reports or articles after the project is finished and the data is reviewed.

- Other scientists might ask for information from this project to answer other questions about PFAS. On the “Informed Consent” document in the welcome packet, you will select whether you give permission to MDHHS to share your survey answers, test results, and samples. If the information is shared, MDHHS will remove all information that could identify you from your survey answers, test results and samples.
 - You will have the opportunity to decide if you want MDHHS to share identifiable information (survey answers, test results, and/or samples) with any researchers outside of MDHHS. We will not share your identifiable information and/or samples without your written permission.

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What precautions are being taken in response to COVID-19?

- MDHHS has established hygiene protocols that ensure the highest level of protection for both participants and project staff. These protocols are based on the recommendations from the CDC and will be updated as new information becomes available.
- Please see the COVID-19 flyer on [our website](#) for more information.

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What should I do if I get COVID-19?

If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 on the day of your appointment or during the two weeks before your appointment, please call 844-464-7327 and reschedule your appointment. Check this link for more information: [Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://www.michigan.gov/Coronavirus).

- For your reference, the following are common symptoms of COVID-19: fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

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What if I still have questions?

- If you have questions about the project, please call **844-464-7327**.
- Project updates will be provided at [Michigan.gov/DEHbio](https://www.michigan.gov/DEHbio).

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