



Voluntary Blood Testing Program for PFAS

PRE-TEST CONSULTATION ADVICE FOR GPs

Under the Voluntary Blood Testing Program, the Australian Government is offering eligible people a free PFAS blood test. Please refer to the factsheet *Voluntary Blood Testing Program for PFAS – Program information for GPs* for advice determining eligibility and to learn more about the Voluntary Blood Testing Program. This factsheet and a number of other factsheets aimed at GPs are available on the Department of Health website: health.gov.au/pfas.

There is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects. However, because these chemicals persist in humans and the environment, human exposure to these chemicals should be minimised as a precaution¹. Further information is available in the *Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) – Health Effects and Exposure Pathways* factsheet.

Prior to requesting a PFAS blood test for a patient, the following may need to be discussed:

- any current symptoms of concern;
- the patient's understanding of PFAS exposure pathways, health effects and treatment options;
- the limitations of blood testing for PFAS;
- follow up after testing; and
- willingness to participate in the *Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS): an epidemiological study*.

Some patients may have symptoms that are causing them concern. These symptoms should be discussed and investigated for the usual causes as appropriate.

Limitations of PFAS blood testing

Because there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects, there is at present insufficient evidence for a medical practitioner to be able to tell a person whether their blood level will make them sick now or later in life, or if any current health problems are related to the PFAS levels found in their blood. That is, PFAS blood tests currently have no diagnostic or prognostic value and cannot be used to guide clinical management.

A blood test can measure the level of PFAS in a person's blood and can tell a person how their blood levels compare with the levels seen in the general Australian population.

Discussion points regarding PFAS blood testing

- All Australians are expected to have detectable levels of PFAS in their blood. A broad range of levels would be expected in all communities due to background exposures.
- There has been testing of pooled blood in Australia to assess the range of levels in the community and this has been useful to document changes over time. This testing did not identify results for individuals.
- A "normal" PFAS range for an individual is not available in Australia or internationally.
- An individual's blood result can be compared to historic pooled community levels.
- Blood levels are not predictive of health problems in individuals. There is no consistent evidence of PFAS resulting in health impacts therefore levels considered higher than the Australian general population may have no clinical relevance to the individual. For this reason, a "minimal risk" level also does not exist in Australia.
- There is no practical treatment available to lower levels of PFAS in the blood.

¹ The Environmental Health Standing Committee of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.

- A PFAS blood test will only tell you the current level of PFAS in an individual's blood.
- PFAS have a very long half-life in humans and persist in the body for many years. The blood level will usually reflect cumulative exposure over this extended period.
- A PFAS blood test cannot tell you when exposure occurred. Nor is it possible to determine the source of PFAS found in an individual's blood.
- The PFAS blood test does not measure the blood level precisely. Tests taken from the same person at the same time show variability as a result of the test methodology.
- The same level in two different individuals may not mean the same level of exposure, due to toxicokinetic differences.
- There are no specific biomarkers to look at effects of PFAS exposure.
- Potential exposure pathways should be discussed with the individual to determine whether or not a blood test is warranted. For example, the use of PFAS in the investigation areas began in the 1970s, therefore; anyone who lived or worked in the investigation area before that time (and not since) is not likely to have been exposed.

A factsheet targeted at patients, titled *Voluntary Blood Testing Program Information for PFAS*, is available on the Department of Health website: health.gov.au/pfas.

Additional dedicated mental health and counselling services

The Australian Government has funded additional mental health and counselling services in the Williamstown, Oakey and Katherine communities to support these communities during this period of uncertainty. These services are being provided in addition to services already provided in those communities by state and territory health departments.

Patients do not need to have had a PFAS blood test to access these services.

Please contact your local Primary Health Network (PHN) to find out more about these services.

- For Williamstown – Hunter, New England and Central Coast PHN (hneccphn.com.au/)
- For Oakey – Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN (ddwmpnh.com.au/)
- For Katherine – Northern Territory PHN (ntphn.org.au/)

The Australian Government has also engaged On The Line Australia to provide a telephone and online counselling service, called *Support Now*. Services can be accessed by calling 1300 096 257 or by visiting the *Support Now* website: supportnow.org.au/.