



Voluntary Blood Testing Program for PFAS

PROGRAM INFORMATION FOR GPs

The Australian Government is offering a free blood test for Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) to people who live or work, or who have lived or worked, in the RAAF Base Williamtown, NSW, Army Aviation Centre Oakey, Qld and RAAF Base Tindal, NT Investigation Areas and who have potentially been exposed to PFAS.

The Voluntary Blood Testing Program will run concurrently with an epidemiological study and free blood testing will be available to eligible individuals until 30 April 2019.

Where individual consent is given, the PFAS blood test results from these areas may be used as part of an epidemiological study to improve the understanding of potential health effects relating to PFAS exposure.

The Australian Government has commissioned the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH) at the Australian National University (ANU) to examine the potential health effects resulting from PFAS exposure in the affected communities of Williamtown, Oakey and Katherine, through an epidemiological study. For more information of the epidemiological study, please visit the ANU website: nceph.anu.edu.au/pfas-health-study.

Both the Voluntary Blood Testing Program and the epidemiological study are available on an opt-in basis and people who decide to have a blood test under this program are not obliged to participate in the epidemiological study.

The Australian Government will not be provided with the personal details of anyone seeking a blood test under this program. The following information has been prepared to assist you if a person presents to your practice wishing to obtain a free PFAS blood test.

Eligibility for testing

Eligibility for testing under this program should be discussed with those seeking a blood test in the context of possible exposure pathways. For further information on exposure pathways and information to discuss with individuals seeking a blood test please refer to the Department of Health website: health.gov.au/pfas. In particular you may wish to refer to the *Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) – Health Effects and Exposure Pathways* and the *Voluntary Blood Testing Program for PFAS – Pre-Test Consultation Advice for GPs* factsheets.

People eligible for a single free blood test under this program include those who:

- currently live or work in the RAAF Base Williamtown, Army Aviation Centre Oakey and RAAF Base Tindal Investigation Areas.

OR

- have previously lived or worked in the Investigation Areas of RAAF Base Williamtown, Army Aviation Centre Oakey or RAAF Base Tindal but now live elsewhere.

Statutory Declaration

A Statutory Declaration will be required from the individual seeking a blood test, or the parent or guardian of a minor, to confirm they are eligible for a free blood test under this program.

People seeking blood tests should print and sign the pre-filled Statutory Declaration which is available on the Department of Health website before presenting at your practice. The Department of Health can also supply your practice with pre-filled Statutory Declaration forms upon request.

Requesting a PFAS blood test

Sonic Healthcare has been engaged by the Australian Government to conduct the blood testing for the Voluntary Blood Testing Program. Sonic Healthcare will provide your practice with specially marked PFAS request forms that are pre-filled with the PFAS testing and billing requirements. This form should be provided to eligible people seeking a blood test under the Voluntary Blood Testing Program to prevent the patient being billed for the blood test. Additional PFAS request forms can be obtained from Sonic Healthcare by emailing commercial.path@sonichealthcare.com or calling 02 9855 5437.

All blood tests under the Voluntary Blood Testing Program must be referred to Sonic Healthcare. The Australian Government will not reimburse the costs of blood tests performed by other pathology providers.

The specially marked request form also includes a section for the individual to consent to their blood sample and result being transferred to the ANU to be included in the epidemiological study and to consent to the study team contacting them in the future. If a patient would like to participate in the epidemiological study, please refer them to the ANU website (nceph.anu.edu.au/pfas-health-study) for more information. To have their blood test result included in the study the patient will need to sign the relevant section on the pathology request form.

Patients must take their completed Statutory Declaration and specially marked PFAS request forms to a Sonic Healthcare Pathology Collection Centre: soniccommercialpath.com.au/about-us/collection-centres.aspx. Sonic Healthcare will use the Statutory Declaration as evidence to bill the Australian Government for the cost of the test.

For current residents of RAAF Base Tindal and Katherine community – Sonic Healthcare do not have a permanent pathology collection centre in Katherine. However, temporary arrangements are in place for patients to have their blood collected by Sonic Healthcare. Please contact Sonic Healthcare (commercial.path@sonichealthcare.com) to find out the local arrangements.

Can people not eligible for the Voluntary Blood Testing Program get a blood test for PFAS?

Individuals not eligible for PFAS blood testing under this program or not willing to sign the Statutory Declaration form can be referred for a blood test but at their own cost.

In this instance, a standard pathology request form should be issued and the pathology provider will bill the patient directly. The private testing fee is approximately \$500 plus GST and is not covered by Medicare.

Patients should also be advised on the diagnostic and prognostic value of the blood test before referral – see factsheet *Voluntary Blood Testing Program for PFAS – Pre-Test Consultation Advice for GPs*.

Can a person who had their blood tested before the commencement of the Voluntary Blood Testing Program get another one?

Yes, however:

- repeat blood testing for PFAS is not recommended and has no clinical value. In humans, studies suggest that it can take many years for PFAS blood levels to go down by half; and
- if the individual wants to get another blood test, and is eligible for the Voluntary Blood Testing Program, then it is recommended that it is done so in the context of the epidemiology study being conducted by the ANU.

Please note that only one free blood test is available under the Voluntary Blood Testing Program arrangements.

Australian Defence Force personnel

Full-time Australian Defence Force personnel (including Reserves rendering continuous full-time service) should seek testing through their usual Defence garrison health facility.

If eligible, families of Australian Defence Force personnel can access testing through the Voluntary Blood Testing Program for PFAS.

Cost of testing and consultation

Under the Voluntary Blood Testing Program, a free blood test and two free general practice consultations are available to eligible people – one prior to the blood test, and one following the blood test. This is to ensure that patients are adequately informed of the limitations of the blood test and have their follow up questions addressed.

Practitioners from anywhere in Australia who provide eligible consultations, should bill consultations to:

- Hunter, New England and Central Coast Primary Health Network (PHN) (hneccphn.com.au/) for people who currently live or work, or have previously lived or worked, in the RAAF Base Williamstown Investigation Area;
- Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN (ddwmpnh.com.au/) for people who currently live or work, or have previously lived or worked, in the Army Aviation Centre Oakey Investigation Area; or
- Northern Territory PHN (ntphn.org.au/) for people who currently live or work, or have previously lived or worked, in the RAAF Base Tindal Investigation Area.

Any other consultations in relation to possible PFAS-related health issues, including with individuals who are not eligible for a free blood test under the Voluntary Blood Testing Program, or further consultations regarding blood test results should follow your practice's normal fee arrangements.

Management of PFAS test results

Under the Voluntary Blood Testing Program, individual blood test results will be reported to the requesting GP within 7-10 days through the practice's usual channel for receiving pathology results. It is recommended that an individual's blood test result be discussed with them in person so that an appropriate explanation of the results can be provided; including the limitations of PFAS blood testing in individuals. Those tested may also be referred to mental health and support services if required.

For further information on interpreting PFAS blood test results please refer to the *Voluntary Blood Testing Program for PFAS – Post-Test Consultation Advice for GPs* factsheet.

As mentioned above, the results and the patient's blood sample will also be provided to the ANU for inclusion in the epidemiological study where consent for that process has been provided.

Protecting patient privacy

The Australian Government will not receive identifiable blood tests results. The Australian Government will be provided with a de-identified summary of the results and a copy of the report of the *Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS): an epidemiological study* once completed. No individuals will be identified through these reports.

Investigation Areas

Maps of the RAAF Base Williamstown, Army Aviation Centre Oakey and RAAF Base Tindal Investigation Areas can be found at:

- Williamstown, NSW – epa.nsw.gov.au/working-together/community-engagement/community-news/raaf-williamstown-contamination
- Oakey, Qld – defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/oakey/publications.asp
- Katherine, NT – defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/Tindal/publications.asp

Further information

The Department of Health

For further information regarding the Australian Government Department of Health's response to PFAS contamination, including health advice published by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and its subcommittee enHealth, please go to the Department of Health website: health.gov.au/pfas.

Alternatively you can contact the Department of Health by phone on 1800 941 180 or by email at health.PFAS@health.gov.au.

The Department of Defence

For further information regarding to the Department of Defence's response to PFAS contamination and site specific information please go the Department of Defence website: defence.gov.au/Environment/PFAS/.