



Voluntary Blood Testing Program for PFAS

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.

The Australian Government will not be provided with the personal details of anyone seeking a blood test under this program.

The following information explains how the Voluntary Blood Testing Program will work and will help you to determine if you are eligible for a free blood test.

What are Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)?

PFAS are man-made chemicals that are used to make many household and industrial products that resist heat, oil, stains, grease and water. PFAS were also used for many years in fire-fighting foams.

PFAS remain for a long time in the environment in soil, water, and also in the human body.

Most people have some PFAS in their blood because these chemicals have been in many products.

Higher levels of PFAS exposure most commonly occur via consumption of contaminated drinking water.

Sites being investigated in Australia have a history of large scale PFAS use in the past and have potential human exposure pathways through consumption of contaminated ground or surface water, or fish contaminated by PFAS.

What are the health effects of exposure to PFAS?

In humans, there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS cause any specific illnesses, including cancer. However, because these chemicals remain in humans and the environment for many years, it is recommended that exposure to PFAS be minimised. For this reason, Australia has been working to restrict the use of PFAS. Further information on PFAS exposure and potential health effects is available in the *Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) - Health Effects and Exposure Pathways* factsheet at health.gov.au/pfas.

Research is ongoing into any possible health effects of PFAS, including an epidemiological study being conducted by the Australian National University (ANU). For more information on the epidemiological study visit the ANU website: nceph.anu.edu.au/pfas-health-study.

Am I eligible for a PFAS blood test under the Voluntary Blood Testing Program?

The Australian Government will fund a single voluntary PFAS blood test for those people who live or work, or have lived or worked, in the Investigation Areas surrounding RAAF Base Williamtown, Army Aviation Centre Oakey and RAAF Base Tindal. This includes people currently living elsewhere who previously lived or worked at these places.

To obtain a free blood test under this program, you will be required to sign a Statutory Declaration to confirm your eligibility. This Statutory Declaration will confirm that you currently live or work or have previously lived or worked in one of the Investigation Areas.

A pre-filled Statutory Declaration is available on the Department of Health website: health.gov.au/pfas. Where possible please complete this Statutory Declaration before presenting to your GP.

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

How do I get my blood tested under the Voluntary Blood Testing Program?

As with any other blood test you must visit your GP to discuss having a blood test before you get your blood tested and afterwards to discuss the results.

Both this pre-test GP consultation and a post-test consultation will be provided free to eligible people. Arrangements have been made for GPs to be paid for the consultations through the relevant local Primary Health Network: health.gov.au/PHN.

The GP will provide you with a specially marked blood test request form to take with you to have your blood taken.

To have your blood test done you will need to visit your nearest Sonic Healthcare Pathology Collection Centre: soniccommercialpath.com.au/about-us/collection-centres.aspx. You will need to take both your completed Statutory Declaration and specially marked blood test request form to the collection centre to have your blood test. Both these documents are needed so you are not charged for the test.

Please note: Sonic Healthcare trades under the name of *Douglass Hanly Moir Pathology* in the Williamstown area and *Sullivan Nicolaides Pathology* in Qld and the NT. If you do not have your blood collected by a Sonic Healthcare centre you will be charged by that pathology provider for the blood 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 you to have your blood taken by Sonic Healthcare.

Please contact your local GP or Sonic Healthcare (commercial.path@sonichealthcare.com) to find out how to get your blood taken.

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

If I already had my blood tested before the commencement of the Voluntary Blood Testing Program, can I get another one?

Repeat testing 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.

If you do wish to get your blood tested again, and you are eligible for the Voluntary Blood Testing Program, then it is recommended that you do so in the context of the epidemiological study being conducted by the ANU

For more information on the study, please visit the ANU website: nceph.anu.edu.au/pfas-health-study.

What do I need to know before having a PFAS test?

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. No PFAS level has been set as "normal" either in Australia or overseas.

There is currently no consistent evidence to suggest that any level of PFAS in your blood will make you sick now or later in life.

How will I get my blood test results?

The blood test results will be sent directly to your GP within 7 to 10 working days after your blood sample was collected. When you visit your GP for the results they will discuss what they may mean for you and how they compare to the general population.

If you have given consent to participate in the epidemiological study when you had your blood collected, your results and your blood sample will also be forwarded to the ANU researchers.

How do I reduce my exposure to PFAS?

Advice will vary with location so please follow the most current advice provided in the Department of Defence's Human Health Risk Assessment for each site (available at defence.gov.au/Environment/PFAS) and your State or Territory Government's advice.

What other support is available?

The Australian Government has funded additional mental health and counselling services in the Williamtown, Oakey and Katherine communities to support these communities during this period of uncertainty.

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

If you need support, please notify your GP, who can refer you to appropriate mental health and counselling services in your region.

Alternatively, please contact your local PHN (health.gov.au/PHN) for information on the services available in your region and how you can access them.

- For Williamtown – Hunter, New England and Central Coast PHN (hneccphn.com.au/)
- For Oakey – Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN (ddwmphn.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/.

Why is the voluntary blood testing program and the epidemiological study focussing only on the Williamtown, Oakey and Tindal Investigation Areas?

The Voluntary Blood Testing Program and the epidemiological study will be conducted in the RAAF Base Williamtown, Army Aviation Centre Oakey and RAAF Base Tindal Investigation Areas because the extent of contamination and the exposure pathways are well understood. The extent of contamination at other sites is still to be determined.

These programs will contribute to our understanding of the health risks associated with PFAS and inform decisions on similar activities at other sites in the future.

Protecting your 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 Williamtown, Army Aviation Centre Oakey and RAAF Base Tindal Investigation Areas can be found at:

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

Where can I get 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/.