



# Voluntary Blood Testing Program for PFAS

From 30 November 2016, the Australian Government will provide free blood testing for Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS).

The free voluntary test will be offered to people who live or work, or who have lived or worked, in the Williamstown, NSW and Oakey, QLD, 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 31 March 2018.

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 potential human exposure 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 no consistent evidence that 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. Research is ongoing into any possible health effects of PFAS — see factsheet *Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS): an epidemiological study* for more information on the epidemiological 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 of Williamstown and Oakey. 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 will be available on the Department of Health website. 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 go to your GP to discuss having a blood test.

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 Hunter New England Central Coast (HNECC) Primary Healthcare Network (PHN) and no other payment will be required.

The GP will provide you with a specially marked pathology request form.

You must take this request form and the Statutory Declaration to a Sonic Healthcare (Sonic) Pathology Collection Centre. Sonic will need the Statutory Declaration to appropriately bill the Australian Government for the cost of the test.

## 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 Australian National University (ANU).

For more information on the study, please refer to the separate factsheet *Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS): an epidemiological 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?

Results will be sent from the pathology laboratory directly to your GP. It is best if you return to your GP to be advised of your results so you can discuss what they mean. In addition, if you have given consent when requesting this blood test, your results will also be forwarded to the ANU researchers for inclusion in the epidemiological study.

## 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 and State Government advice.

- For Williamstown, NSW, refer to the Department of Defence's Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA) Fact Sheet; and the NSW Environmental Protection Agency website: <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/MediaInformation/williamtown.htm>.
- For Oakey, QLD, refer to the Department of Defence's Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA) Fact Sheet; and the QLD Government website: <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/pollution/management/investigation-pfas/oakey/index.html>.

## What other support is available?

The Australian Government has funded additional mental health and counselling services in the Williamtown and Oakey 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, for the Williamtown and Oakey areas, information on the services available to assist you can also be found at [www.hneccpn.com.au](http://www.hneccpn.com.au) for Williamtown and <http://ddwmpn.com.au/> for Oakey.

For those who reside outside of these areas, please contact your local PHN <http://www.health.gov.au/PHN>.

## Why are the voluntary blood testing program and the epidemiological study focussing only on the Williamtown and Oakey sites?

The Voluntary Blood Testing Program and the epidemiological study will be conducted in the Oakey and Williamtown Investigations 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

### Williamtown, NSW

Click [here](#) to view the current Investigation Area map.

### Oakey, QLD

Click [here](#) to view the current Investigation Area map.

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## 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: <http://www.health.gov.au/pfas>.

### 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: <http://www.defence.gov.au/id/PFOSPFOA/Default.asp>.