



## The Epidemiological Study

The Australian National University (ANU) study is examining exposure to and potential health effects of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the towns of Katherine, NT, Oakey, Qld and Williamstown, NSW.

Thank you to everyone who has participated in focus groups and the Voluntary Blood Testing Program so far. The aim of this update is to keep you across results from our research and to outline the approach for future activities.

We are looking for participants in our upcoming studies. If you are interested in participating, further details are provided in this update.

The epidemiological study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the link between exposure to PFAS and health effects which will benefit the community as a whole. We will continue to keep the community updated throughout the study.

## Results from the PFAS Health Study

### The Systematic Literature Review

A systematic review is a critical analysis of the results of high quality scientific research papers. Results are assessed and combined with other studies to provide a clear picture of the evidence. More than 220 papers were included in The PFAS Health Study Systematic Literature Review, which was completed in April 2018.

### The key findings resulting from existing evidence are:

- A link between high cholesterol levels and higher levels of both PFOA and PFOS
- Possible link between high uric acid levels and both PFOA and PFOS
- Possible link between reduced kidney function and both PFOA and PFOS
- Possible link between chronic kidney disease and both PFOA and PFOS
- Possible link between kidney cancer and PFOA
- Possible link between testicular cancer and PFOA

- Possible link between reduced immune response to the diphtheria vaccine and PFOA, PFOS, PFHxS and PFDA
- Possible link between reduced immune response to the rubella vaccine and both PFOA and PFOS

Most research on the link between PFAS exposure and health does not make it clear if PFAS exposure has caused an illness, or having a specific illness makes people more likely to have higher PFAS levels. So a link between PFAS exposure and a specific health outcome may not indicate that PFAS is the cause of that illness.

The full report is available on the study webpage and can be downloaded here: [pfas.anu.edu.au](http://pfas.anu.edu.au)

### The Focus Groups Study

Thank you to the 180 participants of the focus groups for their time and their willingness to talk about their experiences.

Focus group discussions were held between January and August 2018 in each of the three communities participating in the study.

The main discussions were about both physical and mental health concerns, environmental testing and PFAS blood serum testing, financial concerns, community trust and cohesion, local conditions and how people were exposed, and the way forward.

### Key areas raised include:

- Concerns for children's and grandchildren's current and future health
- Concerns for participants' own health, particularly concerning cancer and the decline of existing health conditions
- The uncertainty of the physical health effects caused by PFAS exposure contributing to stress and anxiety
- The financial impact on community members
- The need for transparent and consistent information
- The need for guidance on what to do next

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## Upcoming studies

### The Cross-sectional Survey and Blood Serum Study

These two studies will be run at the same time and will tie in with the Australian Government's Voluntary Blood Testing Program. We anticipate the cross-sectional survey will be released in mid 2019.

We will be mailing the cross-sectional surveys to you, asking about your health (including physical and mental health), potential exposure to PFAS and background information. A separate survey will be sent to parents and guardians of children who live in PFAS Investigation and Management Areas.

We will also be testing PFAS levels in three communities who have been matched on socio-demographic factors to affected towns. People in these communities will be randomly selected to participate and will be invited to have a PFAS blood test and to complete a similar questionnaire to the one sent to residents and workers of Katherine, Oakey and Williamtown.

#### How can you participate?

The easiest way to participate in the PFAS Health Study is to take part in the Voluntary Blood Testing Program by presenting to your doctor and asking to have a PFAS blood test. The pathology request form has a section requesting permission to have your blood test results, a blood serum sample and your contact details sent to the ANU study team.

All participants of the Voluntary Blood Testing Program, who have given permission, will automatically be sent a copy of the questionnaire. If you choose to complete the survey online, a link will be provided for you to do so.

If you do not wish to participate in the Voluntary Blood Testing Program but would like to complete a survey please contact the study team by email at [pfas.health.study@anu.edu.au](mailto:pfas.health.study@anu.edu.au) or by calling 02 6125 6079.

Completing the survey is voluntary, you do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you choose to participate you can withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the study team.



### The Data Linkage Study

The data linkage study will examine whether adjusted rates of diseases potentially associated with PFAS exposure are higher among people who have lived in the Investigation and Management Areas of Katherine, Oakey and Williamtown, compared to those living in the general Australian population.

The study involves linking historical Medicare address data with other data sources including the Australian Cancer Database, the National Death Index and the National Perinatal Data Collection. The data will be linked by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The data provided to the study team will not contain identifying information such as your name or date of birth.

Planning is still underway for this study.

### Useful links and phone numbers

#### Australian Government

Department of Health—<http://health.gov.au/pfas>

Department of Defence—

<http://www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/>

#### Counselling

Support Now is a free telephone and video counselling service being offered to residents, both current and past, of the Williamtown, Oakey and Katherine communities who may have been exposed to PFAS. The service is funded by the Australian Government. Call 1300 096 257.

### Contact Details

If you have any questions or concerns about the study please get in touch with us.

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