

Frequently Asked Questions

I have a high level of PFAS, what does this mean and what should I do?

This means that your body has accumulated PFAS after being exposed to products or materials that contain PFAS. The general population is also exposed to small amounts of PFAS in everyday life through drinking water, food, air, indoor dust and various consumer products. Your exposure may be higher than that of the general population for a number of reasons, including if you have come into contact with AFFF during your employment.

There is currently no clinically recommended treatment to reduce PFAS levels. Your levels of PFAS will go down slowly over time, after the main exposure has stopped. In the case of the 2019 PFAS Exposure Study, the results indicate that significant occupational exposure has ceased, and it is expected that the observed PFAS serum levels in ARFFS Staff will continue to decrease until reaching the levels observed in the general public.

I have high serum PFAS levels as a result of my work for Airservices. Will these levels ever decrease?

Yes. PFASs are eliminated from the body through urine, faeces or loss of blood (e.g. menstruation and blood donation). As the body eliminates these chemicals, the serum (blood) level decreases. In this study, we found that individuals who participated in both the 2014 and current study, had reduced their serum PFAS levels by approximately 50% over this time. This study also provides evidence that exposure to PFASs in current Airservices staff is no longer elevated compared to the general Australian population. Therefore, the PFAS levels in firefighter staff will continue to decrease until they are similar to those seen in the general public.

I recently joined Airservices as a fire fighter. Has this increased my exposure to PFAS?

The levels of PFAS observed in staff employed since 2005 are similar to those seen in the general public in Australia. On this basis, working for Airservices now is not associated with an increased risk of exposure to PFAS chemicals.

Does donating blood have any effect on my PFAS levels?

Yes. People who donate blood have lower levels of PFAS than those that do not, even in the general public. Based on the findings in this study, the more often you donate blood, the lower your PFAS levels will be, unless you are being continuously re-exposed to PFAS.

Am I at increased risk of cancer as a result of PFAS exposure?

This study did not find any association between self-reported adverse health outcomes such as cancer and increased serum PFAS levels. Although there was a statistical association between higher PFOA levels and higher reports of skin cancer, there are many other factors that can cause skin cancer, such as sun-exposure. This study did not gather information about

sun exposure and therefore this could not be considered in the analysis. It is likely that the association between PFOA and skin cancer is a chance finding.

Does the type of work I did for Airservices matter?

This study found that EVT's had higher serum PFAS levels than firefighters, when comparing EVT's and firefighters that had worked with 3M AFFF before 2005. This indicates that EVT's may have had a different mode of exposure compared to the firefighters. It is possible that EVT's were exposed to AFFF concentrate more frequently than firefighters, whereas the firefighters were more likely to be exposed to the foam (which is less concentrated). In the group employed after 2005, the number of EVT's was too low for a meaningful comparison.

Am I being exposed to PFAS through the coating on my PPE?

PFAS can be used in coatings of stain/water resistant clothing, such as PPE. Contact to this coating is a potential route for PFAS exposure. However, this study indicates that participants who started working for Airservices after 2005 had PFAS levels that were in the normal range for the general Australian population. This suggests that any exposure from the coating of the PPE worn by ARFFS staff at work is negligible compared to their exposure to PFAS through daily life.

Can I get exposed to PFAS from legacy contamination?

The results from this study indicate that participants who started working for Airservices after 2005 have not been exposed to PFAS at a level higher than normal for the general Australian population. This indicates that current ARFFS staff do not have higher exposure to PFAS compared to the general population, even though they regularly train and work at sites that have a legacy contamination with PFAS.

If I have a high level of Cholesterol what do I do?

If your cholesterol results are not in the normal reference range, we recommend that you see your usual health provider to discuss these results. It is not possible for us to determine the significance of these results without a full clinical history and examination. There are many reasons why your individual results may be outside of the reference range. These include lifestyle and genetic factors, and it should be noted that these results may not be related to PFAS exposure.

I have a high level of PFAS, what does this mean for my family and friends?

This study did not investigate the impact of high levels of PFAS on other people such as family and friends. The current research has not found any direct risk to family and friends if a person has a high level of PFAS. It is reassuring that even when PFAS chemicals are known to be present in breastmilk, the current recommendation from the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) of Australia, and from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease

Control in the United States, is for nursing mothers to continue to breastfeed, because the benefits from breastfeeding are well documented.

How do I know this study can be trusted and the results obtained are correct?

The study was led by independent researchers at the University of Queensland (UQ). This study adheres to the Guidelines of the ethical review process of The University of Queensland and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. The analysis of biomarkers was done by Sullivan Nicolaides Pathology, an accredited pathology laboratory. The analysis of PFAS was done at the Queensland Alliance for Environmental Health Sciences (QAEHS), at UQ. There were very strict quality control and quality assurance protocols used to maximise the reliability of the results. A subset of the Airservices participants' blood samples was sent for independent PFAS analysis at two accredited laboratories. There was minimal variation between these results from different laboratories which indicates that the QAEHS results are accurate.

Where can I get more information and explanations to help me understand the study outcomes?

The research team is happy to answer any further questions you may have regarding this study. Early in 2021, we will have a website established where these FAQs as well as other study information will be available to all participants. Questions can be asked via a dropbox available on the website. We will update you by email once this website is available. In the meantime, please use the study e-mail address for any questions or concerns: ASAstudy@uq.edu.au

For further assistance you can also call the Employee Assistance Program number EAP/Converge International (1300 687 327) – general line; or the PFAS support Line on 1300 687 321.