



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Health Department Releases PFOA Blood Test and Exposure Assessment Results

BENNINGTON – Vermont health officials hosted a community meeting in Bennington to present the results of its PFOA blood test analysis and exposure assessment. The study was conducted as part of the State’s response to PFOA contamination of drinking water wells in North Bennington.

Speaking to an audience that included people who had their blood tested for PFOA, local and state officials, and other Bennington area community members, Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD, explained that the study confirmed that drinking water from contaminated wells was the primary source of exposure to PFOA. “What we found is that people with higher concentrations of PFOA in their drinking water had higher levels of PFOA in their blood,” said Dr. Chen. “Once exposure is stopped, the PFOA level in the body will slowly decline.”

PFOA (perfluorooctanic acid) is a manufactured chemical that belongs to a group of chemicals used to make household and commercial products that resist heat and chemical reactions, and repel oil, stains, grease and water. Human exposure to PFOA is widespread, and most people in the U.S. have PFOA in their blood.

Dr. Chen said the meeting was part of the state’s ongoing commitment to keeping residents informed and up to date on what is being learned. “We conducted this study to better understand how the people in the community were exposed to PFOA, and to make sure that appropriate actions had been taken to prevent continued exposure,” Dr. Chen said. “Our overriding concern is with the health of the people affected by the contamination, and that they have information about their exposure.”

Julie Moore, Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources which is overseeing the private well water testing, provided an update about her agency’s ongoing efforts to investigate the contamination. Deputy Attorney General Josh Diamond spoke to the efforts of the Attorney General’s Office. In addition to state officials, PFOA-related health and toxicology information was addressed by Alan Woolf, MD, a medical toxicologist, pediatrician and professor with Boston’s Children’s Hospital, Harvard Medical School and the New England Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit; and Captain Tarah Somers, RN, MPH, a commissioned officer and regional director at the U.S. Public Health Service and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

Based upon the study results, the Health Department continues to recommend that water with PFOA above 20 parts per trillion NOT be used for drinking, preparing food, cooking, brushing teeth, watering gardens or any other manner of ingestion. The department is also continuing to update area health professionals, and encourages anyone who has concerns about their health related to their blood test results to consult with their health care provider.

Ten PFOA blood draw clinics were conducted during 2016 by the Health Department, with support from Southwestern Vermont Medical Center. The blood test and exposure assessment drew upon the blood test results of 472 participants who also answered questionnaires. People whose blood was tested either lived in the past eight years at a home in Bennington or North Bennington that had a private well tested for PFOA, or who ever worked or lived at the former Chemfab/Saint-Gobain site in North Bennington. The department mailed individual test results to each participant.

Key Findings

- **Private Well Water Consumption** – PFOA levels in blood were strongly correlated with PFOA levels in well water.
- **Men Compared to Women** – Study results showed higher PFOA blood levels in men compared to women.
- **Occupational Exposure** – As expected, individuals who worked directly with PFOA had statistically higher PFOA levels in their blood compared to those who did.
- **Health Outcomes** – Statistically significant associations were observed between PFOA blood levels and high cholesterol and being treated for high blood pressure. Among women who reported having children, an association was seen between PFOA levels in blood and high blood pressure during pregnancy.

For more information, visit the Health Department's PFOA Contamination Response website: <http://healthvermont.gov/response/environmental/pfoa-drinking-water-2016>

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