

PFAS and Bottled Water

Bottled water may be a safe alternative for people whose usual drinking water supply has been contaminated with PFAS. However, it's important to ensure the producer of the bottled water tests for PFAS in their product. Bottled water with high levels of PFAS is no safer than any other contaminated water supply.

What are PFAS and how do they affect me?

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of man-made chemicals. PFAS are used to make many household products waterproof, stain-resistant, or nonstick. Some nonstick skillets, rainproof clothing, and stain-proofing carpet treatments are made with PFAS. PFAS are also used in firefighting foams.

PFAS can get into the environment at places where they are made, used, stored, or disposed of. In the environment, PFAS do not break down easily and may stay in soil and water for a long time.

A person is exposed to PFAS when they eat or drink them, or when they inhale dust that contains them. PFAS can contaminate groundwater. When this happens, a person's drinking water supply (such as a private well) can become contaminated and the person will be exposed to PFAS when they use the water for drinking, mixing infant formula, making ice, or cooking.

Exposure to PFAS may make a person sick. PFAS may affect the growth and learning of young children, lower a woman's chances of getting pregnant, change a body's hormone or cholesterol levels, harm the immune system, and increase the risk of certain cancers. For more about PFAS in drinking water and its health effects, visit pfas.ohio.gov.

PFAS are a group of man-made chemicals that have many uses and can be found in common products.

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Is bottled water a safe alternative if my usual water supply is contaminated?

Bottled water may be a safe alternative for people whose usual drinking water supply has been contaminated with PFAS. However, it's important to be sure the producer of the bottled water tests for PFAS in their product and treats for it if high levels are found. Bottled water with high levels of PFAS is no safer than any other contaminated water supply.

How do I know if bottled water has been tested for PFAS?

Currently, there are no state or federal laws mandating bottled water companies to test for or treat PFAS in their products. Different bottlers may test and treat for PFAS differently. Some may not test for or treat PFAS at all.

Consider calling the customer care line for your drink brand to ask the bottling company whether they test for and treat PFAS in their product. The labels on many brands of bottled water have the customer care line number printed directly on them. Look on the label for phrases like “Questions?” “Comments?” “For information on water quality, call ...” or “Consumer Information.”

One water treatment process that removes PFAS is reverse osmosis. Consider asking your drink brand whether they treat their water using reverse osmosis.

In Ohio, the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) Division of Food Safety licenses and registers water and soft drink bottlers. To get in touch with the ODA Division of Food Safety, call (614) 728-6250 or email foodsafety@agri.ohio.gov.

The International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) has stated that, as of January 1, 2019, it requires its members to test for PFAS in all the products they sell. IBWA has set limits for PFAS in its members’ bottled water products as:

- 5 parts per trillion for one PFAS chemical.
- 10 parts per trillion for more than one PFAS chemical.

A list of IBWA members can be found at www.bottledwater.org. IBWA’s PFAS statement can be found at www.bottledwater.org/and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas-and-bottled-water.

What should I do if I find out the bottled water I normally buy has PFAS or isn’t tested for PFAS?

If your usual source of drinking water is contaminated with PFAS, and you find out that the bottled water you normally buy is also contaminated or isn’t tested, you may want to make one of the following choices:

- Look for a different brand of bottled water whose producer tests for PFAS and ensures that contaminated water is treated before bottling.
- Consider treating your usual source of drinking water. Information on home drinking water treatment options is available at pfas.ohio.gov. Visit the “Health” tab, open the “Residents” menu, then select “Home Treatment Options” under the “Jump To” menu.

For more information on PFAS and your health, visit the Ohio PFAS website here: pfas.ohio.gov.

Or contact the ODH Health Assessment Section at BEH@odh.ohio.gov or by calling 614-728-9452.