

FACT SHEET: PFAS

What Are They?

Per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) are an ever-expanding group of more than [4,700](#) man-made toxic chemicals that are widely used to make fluoropolymer coating that allows products to be more resistant to heat, stains, grease, and water. Products containing PFAS include food packaging, cooking surfaces, cosmetics, clothing (especially rain gear), furniture, paints, and dental floss. When products containing PFAS are disposed of, it can result in the contamination of [drinking water](#).

Three characteristics of PFAS make them especially **dangerous to humans**. First, they are extremely persistent, resistant to breaking down naturally in the environment, and remain in people's bodies for years. This is why they are often described as "**forever chemicals**." Second, they are highly mobile, spreading quickly and remain prevalent throughout our environment. Finally, they can be **toxic at very low doses** and have been linked to a variety of severe health effects.

Use in Food

The main use of PFAS in food is as food contact materials, including food packaging, non-stick cookware, processing aids and parts used in food processing equipment. Some manufacturers add PFAS to food packaging to make it water- and grease-resistant, which can contaminate the food with which it comes into contact. In [2019](#), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reported that it had detected PFAS in a variety of foods purchased around the country, including produce, meats and seafood, exposing people to contaminated food. In a recent test, PFAS were detected in the [packaging](#) of foods sold by major retailers. This prompted some retailers to announce a switch to safer alternatives, thereby demonstrating the availability of and feasibility of non-PFAS food packaging.

Health Risks

Given their widespread use, PFAS are detectable in the blood of [97 percent](#) of people in the United States. Some of the [toxic effects](#) associated with exposure to these chemicals include **immunotoxicity, cancer, thyroid disease, birth defects, and decreased sperm quality**. They reduce the [immune response](#) to childhood vaccines and may increase the risk of infectious disease. PFAS exposure has been directly [linked](#) to several underlying conditions that make people more vulnerable to severe symptoms of COVID-19, including obesity, asthma, kidney disease, and high cholesterol. Compared to people with no underlying conditions, patients who have these conditions are [six times](#) as likely to be hospitalized with COVID-19 and 12 times as likely to die of the disease.

Consumer Reports Position

We support legislation in various states that would establish a drinking water standard for PFAS, and ban PFAS in food packaging. In addition, we support the following legislation at the federal level:

- **The PFAS Action Act.** This bipartisan bill would set a two year deadline for the EPA to establish a drinking water standard and would set deadlines to restrict PFAS releases into the air and water.
- **Keep Food Containers Safe from PFAS Act.** This bill would ban the use of PFAS in food packaging and cookware.
- **Clean Water Standards for PFAS Act.** This bipartisan bill would regulate the discharge of PFAS into our waterways and hold polluters accountable.