

# PFAS contamination and animal health

June 2018, Primefact 1611, First edition

## Overview

This publication provides information for care of animals for residents living in areas where elevated levels of PFAS have been identified.

## What is PFAS?

PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) are a group of manufactured chemicals that include perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS). Due to their fire retardant, waterproofing and stain-resistant qualities, these chemicals have been widely used in many industrial and consumer products such as food packaging, non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, clothing and fire-fighting foam.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that do not easily break down and can persist for a long time in the environment. PFAS are widely present in the environment at low levels, due to their widespread use and persistent nature.

Investigations are currently underway in NSW to determine the use of PFAS and extent of PFAS contamination, with a focus on sites where these chemicals were used in significant quantities. Throughout these investigations the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) will liaise with land owners to provide tailored advice, if it is needed.

For more information on the PFAS investigation program in NSW, visit the NSW EPA website: [www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas)

## PFAS and animal health

Globally PFAS are emerging contaminants, which means there is a lot we do not know about how these chemicals affect animals, and what impacts they may have.

There is no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS, at concentrations typically found in contaminated areas, is harmful to animal health and wellbeing.

Adverse health effects have been demonstrated in laboratory studies of animals where high levels of PFAS were administered. However, there is insufficient research to confirm whether other animals exposed to PFAS levels present in the environment at contaminated sites will experience similar health outcomes.

Animal owners in areas with elevated levels of PFAS may choose to take steps to minimise their animals' exposure. PFAS accumulate over time so the less exposure an animal has, the less PFAS it will accumulate.

## **How can I reduce my animals' exposure if PFAS has been identified on my property?**

Animals can be exposed to PFAS through the consumption of contaminated surface water, groundwater, feed or soil.

The key way to reduce your animals' exposure to PFAS is to provide drinking water that is not from a contaminated bore or surface water source (like dams, drains, rivers and creeks). Alternate water sources include reticulated water (town water), rain water (collected onsite) or potable water deliveries sourced from non contaminated areas).

## **Can I wash my animals or let them swim?**

PFAS chemicals are not absorbed through the skin. Animals may be exposed to PFAS if they swallow or drink contaminated groundwater, surface water or bore water, when swimming or being washed.

## **Do PFAS levels in animals decrease with time?**

When animals have access to alternative water and food, their PFAS levels reduce over time. The rate that PFAS levels will drop will depend on the animal's species, age, sex and reproductive status.

## **What should I do if my animal is unwell?**

There are many causes of ill health in animals. If your animal is unwell, you should contact your veterinarian.

## **Can I test my animals for PFAS?**

Testing your animals for PFAS will not assist you or your vet to manage their health because it is unclear if, how, or at what levels the chemicals affect animals.

## **Can I sell animals from my property?**

Yes, you can sell your animals. There are no Australian or international restrictions on the production, movement or sale of animals or any animal products from areas affected by PFAS. Residents should refer to specific, precautionary advice regarding personal consumption of home produce, where provided by the NSW Government for their area.

## Where to find more information

For more information on PFAS in NSW

- [www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas)
- [www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/pfos.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/pfos.aspx)
- NSW Environment Line (EPA) - 131 555
- NSW DPI Biosecurity and Food Safety Helpline – 1800 680 244

For advice on animal health or for assistance in developing a plan for the best management of your animal's health, contact your veterinarian.

PUB18/415

---

© State of New South Wales through the Department of Industry, 2018. You may copy, distribute and otherwise freely deal with this publication for any purpose, provided that you attribute the NSW Department of Primary Industries as the owner.

**Disclaimer:** The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (July 2018). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of the Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.